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The Wolves of New York:

OR,

Joe Phenix's Great Man Hunt.

A strange story of the Inner Life of the great Metropolis by day and by night; a tale of the wiles of the Human Wild Beasts who have their lairs in the heart of the Great City, and of the Honest Watch-dogs who guard Society against them.

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AUTHOR OF "THE POLICE SPY," "JOE PHENIX, THE DETECTIVE," "THE DICK TALBOT SERIES," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MARVELOUS ESCAPE.

It was a balmy summer evening, and the big round moon, full up in the heavens, shed its

bright rays upon the ever-moving current of the majestic Hudson, tinging each little wavelet with shining rays of silver.

Full upon Sing Sing's sleeping town the moonlight also fell, and the famous New York State Prison, too, with its cold gray walls, was bathed in the silvery light.

The midnight hour was near at hand, and all was as still as still could be; the inmates of both town and prison were securely locked in slumber's pleasant chain, with perhaps a few exceptions. Within the town some anxious souls kept their vigils by the couch of sickness, and a few hard-pressed workers still labored at their tasks, regardless of tired nature's repeated demands for rest; but within the prison walls there did not seem to be even a mouse stirring; only the vigilant guards were awake, and with restless tread paced their rounds, rifle in hand, in order to guard against the possibility of any of the convicts escaping.

Probably the most lonesome and uncomfortable post of all was that occupied by the warder who marched up and down on the quarry dock, right by the side of the river.

He was the outer picket—the *vedette*, so to

speak—of the prison; beyond him was the river—and liberty!

If any prisoner succeeded in getting beyond the cold gray walls unobserved, then a bold dash past this sentry and a leap into the shimmering waters promised a chance for freedom.

And such a thing had been tried, too, more than once, but always with an unsuccessful result, for the man selected for this important post was always picked from among the best marksmen of the prison guards, and the poor wretch, struggling in the waters, swimming vigorously for life and liberty, offered an easy shot and a fair target, and no warder ever had been known to fail to hit the game, which the convicts knew so well, that only some desperate man weary of life and willing to die ever attempted escape by this almost surely fatal method.

This quarry dock sentry-guard, also, always kept a sharp eye upon the river. The approach of a boat at any time excited suspicion; and during the day any boat that came within hail was ordered off, but at night, particularly at a late hour, if the warning was not heeded, the sentinel's duty was to fire upon the intruder,



UP TO HIS SHOULDER CAME THE RIFLE AND HE TOOK DELIBERATE AIM AT THE CONVICT AS HE CLIMBED INTO THE YAWL.

first of course giving the boat occupants fair warning of their peril.

Then, too, as a further measure of precaution, only a short distance away was the boat-house, where the prison guard-boat was kept. The crew always slept in the upper part of the house, ready-dressed, so as to take to their oars at a moment's notice.

But there was little danger of an escape by night, for after supper all the convicts were securely locked in their respective cells; hence, for a prisoner to get a chance to escape by way of the river, after dark, he must manage to secrete himself somewhere outside, during the day, and as the convicts were all counted each night, before being locked up, it was seemingly impossible for such a thing to be done, and detection be evaded.

Knowing all these facts, the sentinel guard marched up and down upon his beat with an easy conscience as far as any escape was concerned; yet none the less vigilant was he through the silent night-watch over dock and river.

The moonlight was so bright that all objects could be distinguished almost as well as by day, and the keen-eyed sentry, looking out upon the water, beheld a dark mass floating slowly along on the surface of the tide.

At first he thought that it was a log, but, as it came nearer he made out that it was a boat, unoccupied, too; hence his inference that the craft was adrift.

It was a good-looking, substantial boat, and as it came abreast of the dock upon which the sentry stood, he could see the "painter" dragging in the water behind it; the boat was going down-stream, stern first.

The sentinel paused for a moment to watch the progress of the boat floating by within a hundred feet of the pier, and that moment was the one chance for a man—a convict, evidently, by his striped suit—who had been skulking in the shadow of a huge pile of stones.

With the speed of a grayhound he ran forward to the edge of the dock and then leaped boldly into the water.

The sound of the footsteps and the plunge into the river startled the sentinel, who then was at the upper end of the pier, while the convict had leaped from the lower end, and now was striking out with vigorous strokes to intercept the boat.

"Escape, escape! Turn out, guard!" the warder shouted, as he ran to the lower end of the pier.

With his rifle ready cocked he could have put a ball through the head of the fugitive, who was barely thirty feet off, but, rough, brutal fellow as he was, he hesitated; it did seem too much like murder; and then, too, the prison-boat would be in the water in a minute, so that even if the fleeing felon succeeded in gaining the floating yawl there wasn't the slightest chance for him to escape, for the guard-boat pulled six oars, against his two, that is supposing the fugitive was lucky enough to find a pair of oars in the stray craft—which was doubtful.

So the warder contented himself with shouting for the guard-boat; and its crew, alarmed by the first signal, had jumped at once for their positions, and just as the prison-boat shot out of the darkness of the boat-house into the moonlit river, the fugitive reached the side of the stray craft. A dark form arose from the bottom of the boat at that moment and assisted the convict to clamber in.

"Hallo, hallo!" cried the warder, "this means business! It is all a put up job, after all. I must see if I can put a stop to this bird's egging."

Up to his shoulder came the rifle and he took deliberate aim at the convict as he climbed into the yawl.

"It's about as pretty a target as I ever see'd," he muttered, as he glanced along the rifle barrel, and then as coolly as though the game at which he was aiming was a bird or a rabbit, he pulled the trigger.

The sharp report of the shot rung out on the still air, and the convict tumbled forward into the boat.

"Aha! I knew that I could plug him!" the warder cried.

But to his utter surprise, the man rose, took his place upon one of the seats, apparently unhurt; his companion did likewise; out flew two pair of oars, and the twain bent to them lustily.

"Missed him, by blazes!" cried the disappointed marksman.

And the crew of the prison-boat were surprised, too, for the sentry was one of the best of shots; that he should fail to hit such an excellent mark at that slight distance was really astonishing.

"Give way, boys, with a will!" the captain of the guard-boat cried; "we'll overhaul them before they have gone a quarter of a mile."

The crew bent to their oars, and their boat shot with constantly increasing speed over the glassy surface of the tide.

Meanwhile the fugitives were pulling with desperate might, but two pairs of oars stood no chance against three, and the guard-boat gained rapidly.

"That's it—hit her up again—lively now, boys!" cried the captain, excited over the chase.

And "hit her up" they did; but with that sudden spurt one of the oars snapped off at the blade.

"Blast the luck!" the captain cried; "we're only even with them now. Stop pulling, No. 5, and the rest of you put in your best licks!"

And "put in" the rest did with the result that in the next six or eight strokes three more oars snapped, two on one side and one on the other, when the boat swung sharp around.

"Treachery, boys, by blazes!" cried one of the crew, examining the first oar which had broken. "This oar has been sawed half-through."

And a careful examination showed that all the others which had broken had been served in the same manner!

Then with their rifles they opened fire on the escaping men, but in vain, for the fleeing boat soon disappeared in the shadows of the opposite shore.

The trick with the oars they had discovered, but not one of them suspected that there had been foul play with the rifles, too, and that they all had been firing blank cartridges!

And thus Captain Molly was let loose again, to prey upon society, but his escape cost the Wolves of New York just five thousand dollars.

CHAPTER II.

A NOVEL WAGER.

AND who was Captain Molly that any one should take so much trouble in regard to him?

Not a detective in the city but could have answered, although the captain was a new hand, comparatively speaking, for it was but a few years that he had become known to the police as a member of that great army who are ever at war with honest men. He was slender in build, delicate in appearance, quite womanish-looking, although by his deeds he had given ample testimony that upon occasion he was as brave as a lion and could fight like a tiger-cat. No common rascal was he, but one who flew at big game; indeed, the old German name would have fitted him well—he was truly a "Master Thief."

He had, however, come to grief at last—had been caught and caged; but the great secret band, leagued to make war upon all who possessed valuables, could not endure the thought that dashing Captain Molly should linger in durance vile, so they raised a purse and the result of their contributions the reader has already seen.

Captain Molly would not have got off so happily for him (for it is no small task, even with plenty of money, to buy a convict sentenced for five years out of the State prison) if the agent who had taken charge of the affair had not been an adept in such transactions; and, not the least strange part of the affair was that the "Wolves"—as these brigands delighted to term themselves—were utterly ignorant in regard to this agent. Whether it was a man or woman they knew not. All they did know was that Captain Molly, speaking from his cell in the prison, through that secret means of communication which exists between the prisoners and the outside world, despite all the efforts of the authorities to prevent it, told his associates that if they would raise a certain sum and deposit it in the hands of a law firm, well known for its dealings with the criminal classes, his rescue could be effected.

The money was raised and the prisoner escaped, but, as to the particulars of the escape the world at large was kept in the dark.

But now, let us shift the scene of our story to the great city itself—to New York at night, just as the opera is over and the audience comes pouring out into the street.

The Academy had been well patronized that evening. The grand opera of Sardanapalus, whose scene was laid in an Eastern land, had been given, and in the course of the performance a troupe of Eastern dancing girls had been introduced—Arabs it was said they were—whose success had taken the town by storm. Not that the troupe in themselves were remarkable, but the chief dancer was really marvelous. She was a tall, supple girl, whose every movement was the poetry of motion. Since the days of Fanny Ellsler New York had not witnessed such a dancer; and then, too, she was as beautiful as woman could be, with a sort of fascination about her mobile face, and the wild, savage beauty of the panther in her movements.

Bel Amein she was called, and half of the fashionable young men of the city were captivated by her charms, but she, seemingly, was as proud as an Egyptian princess, and was so jealously guarded by the rest of the troupe that it was impossible for any one to gain access to her.

Two young men coming out of the Academy were busily engaged in talking about this wild beauty.

A pair of the gilded youths of the metropolis were these two—descendants and representatives of two of the oldest and best families: Clinton Livingston and Elbert Van Tromp. With the first our tale will have very little to do, but as the second will be one of the chief characters of our social and criminal revela-

tion, a few words of description will not be out of place.

Elbert Van Tromp was a good specimen of the old Dutch race Americanized by the lapse of years—the old Knickerbocker line, the original settlers of New York. He was tall and well proportioned, with a rather pleasant face, although marked by a few hard lines which were rather out of place upon the features of so young a man. He had the blue eyes and yellow-brown hair of his old Dutch ancestors and their rather massive face.

The two young men were disputing about the wonderful Arab dancer as they came forth; both were warm admirers of the girl, but with this difference—Livingston said that she looked like a princess, and seemed out of place upon the stage exposed to the gaze of the multitude, while Elbert laughed at the idea which appeared to him absurd.

"Princess? Nonsense!" he cried. "No more a princess than I am. She is only a half-barbarian, and probably not an Arab at all—more likely one of those half negroes from Algeria."

"Well, for a half-savage she takes precious good care of herself," the other retorted. "Why, I know a round dozen of the fellows who have tried their best to get acquainted with her but it was no go. Flowers and presents don't seem to have the slightest influence on her."

"They didn't bid high enough!" the other replied. "All these creatures have their price, but some cost more than others."

"You haven't tried your luck yet?"

"No; for when I try I will succeed," complacently remarked Van Tromp.

The other, nettled by the tone and words, retorted: "I would be willing to bet you a trifle that if you try you won't be favored with any better luck than the rest of us."

"I never bet trifles," sententiously.

"Well, I will lay you more than a trifle, then—anything you like."

"What are the terms of the bet?"

"That you don't succeed in winning the attention of this Arab dancer."

"How much?"

"A hundred!"

"Oh, nonsense, that is not worth troubling my head about."

"How much, then?"

"Five thousand!"

"It's a bargain!"

The two shook hands on the wager.

"But I say, how long do you give to win this match?" Van Tromp inquired. "Rome wasn't built in a day, you know, and I am rather one of the slow and easy kind."

"Oh, any reasonable time; set it yourself."

"Three months, say."

"So be it; I am satisfied; but is three months long enough?"

"Oh yes; if I cannot win a woman in three months I will never be able to win her."

By this time the two had reached Broadway.

"Where to?" Van Tromp asked, as they halted for a moment upon the corner.

"Home."

"Well, I'm going to the club to get a bit of a lunch; ta, ta! Don't forget to have your five thousand ready, by the way!"

"Same to you," and Livingston laughed as he turned up the street.

Van Tromp was compelled to remain for a moment on the edge of the pavement as a passing carriage barred the way, and a gentleman, very slight and womanish in his appearance, and dressed neatly in a dark business suit, took advantage of the pause to accost the New Yorker with:

"That was a very rash bet that you made, sir, and you are certain to lose it."

Van Tromp was one of those cool men who are seldom disturbed by anything, and he turned deliberately and stared at the man, to behold rather an odd face—a face with a Jewish cast, dark eyes, rather prominent cheek bones, the chin very smoothly shaven—so smooth that there wasn't the least trace of a beard visible, and this fact gave the face a singular look, for while the lower part was that of a boy of fifteen, the upper, on the contrary, was that of a man of thirty.

"I beg your pardon, sir; did you speak to me?"

"You know I did; you heard what I said well enough," replied the other, returning Van Tromp's look with one of equal insolence.

"I fail to recall to mind that I have ever been introduced to you," the New Yorker remarked, haughtily.

"You never were, for we grew up together."

"Eh!" and Van Tromp now was really astonished, and looked searchingly in the man's face.

"Oh yes, I know I have changed a great deal and have just returned to New York after quite a long absence, but you haven't changed a bit since you were a boy, and I recognized you the moment I saw you coming down the steps of the Academy. I stopped here to speak to you, and that was how I came to overhear your bet. You have made a deuced foolish wager, my

dear Elbert, for you will most surely lose. Bel Amein is much more likely to stick a knife in you than to yield her love."

"Who are you?" asked Van Tromp, puzzled.

"Reginald Tadcaster, son of Ishmael Tadcaster, who used to be your father's confidential man."

"Well, you do look like him, but your hair was light like mine."

The other laughed.

"Grief and care have darkened it."

"I understood that you went to the bad, abroad."

"One hears all kinds of stories, but one thing I know:—I can do you a service, if you pay me for it, and if you don't I will seek your elder brother, Rutger, the man who ought to have the estate you now enjoy."

Elbert Van Tromp started and a dark look came over his face; the bold frankness of the speaker irritated him.

Again the other laughed, the mocking, satanic-like laugh that gave such an evil expression to his rather handsome face.

"My words do not please you, eh? Well, I do not wonder; it is not pleasant to be told that the princely fortune one enjoys rightfully belongs to another."

"It is easy to make assertions, but when we come to their proof, sometimes it is a most difficult matter."

"It will not be difficult for me to prove what I have said; but come, this is no place to hold an important conversation. Suppose you name a place where we can talk the matter over without interruption."

"Tadcaster, what are you up to?" asked Van Tromp, abruptly. "What little game are you trying to play?"

"Oh, you are suspicious, eh?" with a sneer.

"Yes, and I have good reason to be; if you are Reginald Tadcaster, and I fully believe you are, despite the great change in your personal appearance since we were youths together, for the last ten years, since we parted at college, you have led a life which will not bear inspection if report speaks true. Your shabby-genteel appearance now is against you; you look like a confidence-man, or a hotel sneak-thief; there is something about you—an inexpressible something, hard to describe—which shows that you are 'down on your luck.' You accidentally ran across me and think you can make a strike, but you are wasting your time; it cannot be done. I have an elder brother, or half-brother, to speak more correctly; he would have inherited half of my father's estate if my father had not seen fit to leave all to me with the exception of a small annuity bequeathed to him so that he would have no chance to contest and break the will."

"You are speaking of the last will made by your father," the other remarked, in a careless sort of way.

Van Tromp shot a quick, piercing glance at the face before him.

"The last will? The last and only will?" he replied, haughtily.

"Of course, for the document which you found and destroyed after your father's death, was only a rough draft, and not the real will itself, eh?"

The thrust, so sudden and unexpected, still more startled Van Tromp; he could not help wincing, as the other noticed, for he added:

"The shot hit you fairly, eh? And yet I will frankly confess that I was only guessing. I knew that a draft of the will existed, for my father drew it out; and from it he also wrote the will itself; he was one witness and I the other, and that will is still in existence, although you destroyed the draft."

The face of Van Tromp became ghastly white and he clutched the other by the arm.

"Tadcaster, you are not deceiving me?" he cried.

"No! What object have I to gain by attempting such a game? I come to you in the first place, rather than to Rutger, because he and I were never on good terms; besides, he is a fool; he has some abstract ideas about honesty and such things which are ridiculous. He would not bargain with me to my satisfaction, but you will, I know, when you come to understand matters rightly. You see how frank I am! Besides, there is another reason for me to dislike your half-brother: he has come between me and a woman, and so interfered with me in a way that I cannot brook."

"So, even you, Tadcaster, with your heart of ice and head of iron, can love?"

"Oh no; you mistake; it is not that kind of love exactly, but the woman was useful to me, and this brother of yours, with his handsome face, has turned her head, and the result is that she no longer wishes to serve me as in days of yore; but come, this is no place for such talk. You see now, do you not, that I am not trying to 'strike' you without good reason?"

"We will take a cab and go up to my house; we could go to the club, but you are not exactly presentable," Van Tromp remarked, with a glance at the attire of the other.

"Oh, I will be in full feather in a few days; I have good reason for not dressing better now; it is not the want of money."

Van Tromp hailed a cab, and the two, getting in, were driven to the bachelor apartments of the New Yorker, in one of the up-town "Flats."

Over a glass of wine they sat for a long and earnest confab.

The story of the Van Tromp family is briefly told:

Rutger Van Tromp, the father, was the only son of an honest Dutch farmer who, years ago, owned a good-sized farm by the Bowery "road" on the outskirts of the then young metropolis. As the city grew the farm was cut up into building lots, and when the old man died the son found himself a wealthy man. He married; a child was born, and Rutger he was named, after the time-honored custom in the family of always giving to the eldest boy the old family name. But, right after the birth of his boy, Van Tromp met his evil genius, a beautiful woman, far lovelier than the plain, simple and honest girl whom he had married. With this woman he became so infatuated that it was the talk of the town. The wife bore it as long as she was able, but Van Tromp, being of a cold, cruel and selfish nature, made her life unbearable, and at last she left him. She applied to the law for a legal divorce, but, while the suit was pending (for Van Tromp fought it savagely, and in those days the marriage bond could not be so easily rent asunder as in the present time) the wife died—literally died of a broken heart—and Van Tromp, thus opportunely set free, with almost indecent haste married the siren for whose sake he had neglected the woman whom, at the altar, he had sworn to love, honor and cherish.

The second wife, though, amply avenged the first, for she led the husband a deuce of a life. About a year after her marriage a son was born to the second wife, so that Van Tromp had two heirs instead of one.

The rôle of the step-mother is proverbially hard, but it was not so in this case, for, as if she repented of the evil which she had wrought the mother, she strove to repair it by good deeds toward the boy. Rutger was always as well treated as Elbert her own son. The two lads were educated together, sent to England to college together, for, like many another purse-proud man who has risen from nothing, a home school was not good enough for Rutger Van Tromp's sons.

Van Tromp's wealth consisting chiefly of real estate necessitated the employment of an agent, and one Ishmael Tadcaster, an Englishman, served Van Tromp in this capacity for the last twenty years of his life, and made himself so useful that he was given the entire charge of all of Van Tromp's affairs.

This man had a son, Reginald by name, just about the same age as Van Tromp's boys, and the three were brought up together. Reginald and Elbert being alike in disposition, crafty and selfish, got on very well, but Rutger, who was "all mother," from top to toe—generous, impulsive and honest as the day is long—could not join in with the others. And these qualities, which should have endeared him to his father, on the contrary made Van Tromp dislike him. The son was a perpetual reminder of the mother whom he had treated so cruelly.

The three boys all grew up together and were not separated until the death of Van Tromp, which occurred very suddenly, and, strange to say, Ishmael Tadcaster only survived his master a day; it was as if one shock produced the other, and the man died as abruptly and without warning as his master.

At the time of Van Tromp's death, which occurred about a year before the time at which we take up the thread of our story, both of the sons had just returned home from college, but young Tadcaster had remained in England, and, as report said, afterward became involved with some very disreputable associates. As it happened at the time of Van Tromp's death, Rutger was away from home on a visit to some friends in the country, but Elbert chanced to be in the house and was the first person informed by the horrified servant of the dreadful event.

Being utterly unscrupulous, Elbert at once seized upon the chance to examine his dead sire's papers. A regularly executed will he found, bequeathing all the property to him excepting a certain amount set aside to provide the elder son with a small annuity. This will was all properly executed and signed, and in the same envelope was a rough draft of another will, dated ten years later, in which the property was equally divided between the two sons. It was as if toward the end of his life the old man had repented of his harshness. This paper had no legal value, for it was not signed, and although Elbert was sorely afraid when he came across it that the second will possibly might have been executed, yet it was not to be found. So, concluding that the purpose which his father had formed had never been carried out, Elbert promptly burned the memoranda.

And this was how he came into possession of the estate.

Tadcaster now was able to throw light upon the subject—the non-finding of the second will, the production of which would of course in-

validate the other—that is, if he could be depended upon to speak the truth, and upon this point Van Tromp was a little doubtful. He knew Tadcaster of old and believed that he would not hesitate at anything to reach the end he desired—a man with one of those easy consciences who never hesitated at a lie if it would serve his purpose better than the truth.

But the fellow did seem to be telling a straightforward story enough, now, and Elbert could not pick a flaw in it.

"The will was executed," Tadcaster averred.

"My father was one of the witnesses and I was the other. Your father, a little doubtful perhaps of you, intrusted the will to my father's keeping, and he, acting on the instincts of his race—my father was a son of Egypt, you know, a Romany, or Gipsy, as they are generally termed—hid the precious document away, and he, too, as doubtful of me as your father evidently was of you, did not intrust the secret to my care; but, for all that, I think I can find it, for I have great influence over the person to whom the secret was confided."

"I presume it would be contrary to your policy to let me know who that party is," Van Tromp remarked, a crafty light shining in his cold blue eyes.

"Oh, no! for, even if you were to attempt to double on me and take the trick out of my hands, your effort would be fruitless," Tadcaster replied, coolly. "Cynthia, Queen of Little Egypt, was my father's confidant, and if he died with any secret on his soul the queen knows it."

"Cynthia, Queen of Little Egypt," Van Tromp remarked, thoughtfully; "what an odd title!"

"She's a Gipsy girl, now in this country with a portion of the tribe. Like my father, you know, I am a Romany, although brought up among the house dwellers, as my people call your people. And if any race in the world live up to the old motto that blood is thicker than water, it is the Romany tribe. We stick to each other until the death, and no matter what a man may do to the house-dwellers, so long as he keeps faith with his own people he may at any time call upon his tribe for aid, and he will get it to the extent of their power."

"So I have read, but I had no idea that there were any great number of Gipsies in this country."

"Well, there isn't a great many—two or three hundred all told, and the greater part of them are of this Little Egypt band."

"How soon can I know about this affair, and what terms will you make if you get the document?"

"It will take time; and as to terms, wait until I get hold of the paper—then it will be time enough to talk about terms."

And in this rather unsatisfactory way, to Van Tromp, the interview terminated.

The New Yorker was in great doubt. Would he be able to buy off this hungry wolf without giving up the greater part of his fortune?

CHAPTER III.

LITTLE EGYPT.

In a little open common close to the roadside, just back of Fort Lee on the Hudson, that pleasant breathing-place for the busy citizens of great Gotham, quite a large band of Gipsies had pitched their encampment.

The common was fringed on three sides by a little belt of woodland, and under the shadows of the trees the never-tiring wanderers over the face of the earth had set up their extremely primitive tents. They had some ten wagons, all told, and horses enough to draw them, so that the camp was quite a little sight.

Before each tent three sticks were set, crossed at the top, and the traditional iron pot, with its savory, slowly-stewing mess sent up a most appetizing odor.

Quite a thriving trade the Gipsies did, for from this common center the lads and lasses spread out, while the old folks remained at home and took care of the camp. The men were tinkers, umbrella-menders, knife-sharpeners and peddlers of various notions, while the girls told fortunes and sold "charms" and bits of finery from house to house.

At night the Gipsy camp was quite a picturesque sight, when the camp-fires were burning brightly, and the dark-skinned people were scattered about, lazily lolling on the ground, surrounded by a curious throng of strangers, for at night the wandering people garnered their greatest harvest. Under shelter of the darkness many a credulous soul sought the Gipsies' camp, eager to have his or her fortune told, and thus learn what the future had in store. And many a suspicious "house-dweller," too, who had missed sundry small articles which had disappeared in the most mysterious manner, took a stroll over to the Gipsy encampment, thinking possibly that their eyes might light upon some of their property, for whether the tawny sons of Egypt helped themselves to anything or not, everybody believed that they did, and that was just as bad.

The great center of attraction in the camp was the tent of the queen, the presiding genius of the band. This was about double the size of

any of the other tents and was fancifully decorated.

And when any anxious seekers after knowledge, burning to peer into the mysteries of the future, came to the encampment and made known their purpose, they were informed that they could be accommodated at all sorts of prices from twenty-five cents to one dollar, and if they chose to pay this latter sum the queen herself would read the future and tell what the stars had in store for them.

And quite a number paid their dollar willingly, for to them the queen's name was indeed a tower of strength.

In the early part of the evening the throng of visitors was always greatest, but, as the night wore on, the country people gradually departed, and, after ten, few visitors remained. Then the Gipsies prepared for rest, excepting the few who prowled off in the darkness, evidently on mischief bent, as many a good housewife, the next morning, mourning over plundered hen-roosts, or vegetable gardens despoiled of their treasures, could testify.

And on the night of which we write, just the sixth one from that on which Captain Molly bade good-by to Sing Sing's walls in such a dexterous manner, by eleven o'clock the last visitor had departed, and the Gipsies either prepared to retire or to depart on their nocturnal expeditions.

At half-past eleven, the men were off who were going and most all the rest of the party had settled down for the night.

Before the door of the queen's tent, though, the watch-fire still burned, and a little group was seated, busy in conversation.

There were two men and one woman, and all puffing away at their pipes.

The conversation was carried on in low, mysterious tones, as though they were afraid of being overheard.

"I tell you it is no good—no good will come of it," declared one, an old gray-haired man, and he shook his head sagely. "He will bring evil upon all of us."

"But we cannot refuse him shelter," grumbled the woman, who was a toothless old bag, repulsive to look upon. "He is of our blood, and what true Egyptian ever denied food, fire and salt to a blood? Blood is thicker than water."

"Little cares he for the ties of blood except when the dogs of the law are baying at his heels; then he flies, like the crow to carrion, to his brothers," observed the third one of the party, a muscular man of middle age with a huge black beard.

"The Romany never refuses to protect a brother," replied the woman, with all a woman's obstinacy.

"True, very true, but this brother is only half Romany; and then, what good is he to the tribe?" queried the old man, angrily. "Does he stay with us? No! Does he turn in his earnings to the general good? Not he! He goes among the house-dwellers; his heart is with them, not with us; and what has he made out of the house-dwellers? What profit can he show? Nothing! but, when he breaks their laws and the chase is hot after him, then comes he like a whipped cur to us sons of Egypt and cries out—'I, too, am a Romany; give me shelter!'"

"He will bring ruin upon all of us!" exclaimed the black-bearded man, fiercely. "Mark my words! he will bring us all to destruction. You will see! If one of our brothers helps himself to a fat chicken, the house-dwellers swear and that is all; even a horse may be doctored, carried off and disposed of elsewhere, but the trick this fellow is up to no true Romany ever took a hand in; he will be hanged; that will be the end of it. Remember what I say, and in the time to come you will find that Lemuel is a true prophet."

"But she will have it so," and the old woman nodded her head significantly toward the tent of the queen as she spoke. "She is a true daughter of Egypt, though she does spend half her time with the house-dwellers. With her no bond is stronger than the bond of blood. She would peril life to save him from harm."

"And little thanks would she get for it, either," the black-bearded man growled. "I tell you there is no good in that man; the blood of our tribe which flows in his veins has been so weakened and tainted by contact with the blood of the house-dweller that it is no longer akin to the blood of Egypt. He is a snake; he crawls into our camp almost dead, chilled by adversity; our queen with her great heart warms him into life again, and, like the snake in the story, some day he will turn and sting the hand that has tended him."

The older man bowed his head in token that he agreed with the sentiment, and even the old crone nodded assent, although she still continued to grumble between her almost toothless jaws about "blood being thicker than water," and that "true Romany never refused assistance to a brother."

The sound of footsteps advancing toward them from the darkness of the road now attracted their attention.

They peered earnestly into the darkness in

the direction from which came the sound. Only partly civilized, like their half-brothers, the red Indians, or their still nearer kindred, the wild Arabs of the desert, they had wonderful acuteness of ear and eye, and detected that the footsteps were those of a stranger.

But, what wanted a stranger at such an hour? No good, perhaps, and instinctively the Gipsies glared around them as if they expected danger.

The visitor's steps came nearer and nearer—stalwart steps and bold ones, and then into the circle of light of the glimmering camp-fire, around which the three were seated, stepped a tall and well-proportioned man. He was dressed rather roughly, with his unkempt hair and bushy brown beard, looking like a farmer fresh from his barn.

"Good-evening!" said the stranger, as he halted before the fire and surveyed the three Gipsies with evident curiosity. "Is this the Gipsy camp?"

The alarm of the children of Egypt passed away, for, from the man's appearance they judged that he was simply one of the farmers in the neighborhood who had visited the camp out of curiosity, possibly to have his fortune told, and had selected a rather unseemly hour for fear of ridicule from some of his neighbors whom he might meet if he came earlier.

"Good-evening; it is a pleasant night, sir," responded the elder Gipsy.

"Are all your folks abed?" the man asked, with a curious glance at the tents, only one of which showed any signs of life within—the tent of the queen.

"Nearly all; it is late, and we rise early; we generally go to bed betimes."

"Perhaps I am too late, then. I heard that you were in the neighborhood, and I came to have my fortune told."

"It is late," and the Gipsy shook his head. To make the matter unseasonable, the stranger might be induced to pay more.

"Yes, I know it is late, but I couldn't very well come earlier, and then, you know, a man of my age doesn't like being laughed at. My neighbors are a pack of fools, and I should never hear the last of it if they knew I had the curiosity to come to have my fortune told."

"It is very late," and old Lemuel shook his head, gravely. "The queen is the only one who is up—"

"Ah, yes," cried the stranger, "the queen; that is it, exactly. She is the one who tells such wonderful fortunes, eh?"

"She reads what is written in the stars, and the stars speak truth, always!" exclaimed the old woman.

"The queen? Oh, yes; I have heard of her; she will do. They say her fortunes are good ones, and a man at my age, you know, don't want a bad fortune."

The Gipsies exchanged glances; for a man of his years and appearance he had very little sense; he might therefore be a pigeon worth the plucking.

"I don't know as the queen would be willing to trouble herself at this hour of the night; our queen is a queen, do you mind," Lemuel observed.

"Oh, yes; of course I know that; everybody says she is a queen. I wouldn't give a fig to have my fortune told by any one else."

A candid admission by which the Gipsies made up their minds to profit.

"You will have to pay the queen well to have a fortune told at this hour," the old woman announced.

"Oh, yes; I will pay well; I do not grudge a bit of money when my mind is set upon anything!" the man exclaimed, boastfully, and he jingled the silver in his pocket as he spoke.

"The queen will want five dollars at the least," the black-bearded Gipsy asserted.

"Oh, she will not tell a fortune for five, at such an hour as this; she will want ten," old Lemuel interposed.

"Five, ten!" exclaimed the man, in dismay. "Oh, upon my life! I have not got as much money as that with me."

"Oh!" and the three Gipsies groaned in chorus.

"How much have you?" Lemuel inquired.

"Well, two dollars maybe; I was told that it would only cost me one."

"Yes, but not at such an hour as this; it is one in the daytime, but I will see what the queen says," and the old Gipsy rose and going to the lighted tent entered it; while the stranger jingled his coins and looked around him in a disconsolate sort of way.

This movement was only a blind, for the Gipsies knew well enough that the conversation could not have escaped the sharp ears of the queen.

Within her tent sat the dark-eyed Egyptian girl, the absolute ruler over this wild band, and also a man, youngish in appearance, dressed in the wild, semi-civilized fashion peculiar to the Zingari.

"Let the fool come in and take his money," said the young man, with a sneer.

"No; tell him to come to-morrow; I have an apprehension of danger," remarked the queen, with a troubled face.

"No danger; he is only a fool of a farmer," declared the old Gipsy.

"Oh, take his money; and that he may not be alarmed by my presence I will crawl under the buffalo robe," and the young man proceeded by throwing himself upon the ground and pulling the robe over him.

The girl would fain have dismissed the night-caller, but, since all seemed to so wish she directed that he be admitted.

Lemuel returned to the camp fire and informed the caller that, after great trouble, he had succeeded in persuading the mystic woman to receive him; at which the man expressed his satisfaction, counted out his two dollars into the hand of the old Gipsy, and then was conducted to the presence of the Gipsy queen.

The tent was lighted by a lantern swinging from the center pole; the queen was seated upon a box, turned into quite a dignified couch by the buffalo-robe thrown over it, while on the other side of the canvas room was the man concealed beneath the skin.

The stranger had an honest-looking face, although his soft felt hat was pulled down over his brows like a highwayman, and the queen, although filled with an apprehension of danger, produced she knew not by what, concluded that she had nothing to fear from him.

"You wish your fortune told?" she queried.

"Yes, miss, if you please. Shall I sit down?" and he made a movement as if to sit down upon the man concealed under the robe.

"No, no; you must stand!" springing to her feet and staying him with her hand, as the man under the robe moved, instinctively—an act which did not escape the keen eyes of the stranger, and with wonderful quickness he pulled the robe from off the man, flashed out a revolver and leveled it full at the head of the surprised Gipsy.

"Surrender, Captain Molly! I am Joe Phoenix, the detective."

Never was there a more complete surprise.

CHAPTER IV.

TWO LOVES FOR ONE HEART.

ONE of the handsomest houses on Fifth avenue is the stately mansion of old Alexander Gainsworth, right opposite Central Park.

The general was one of the best known men in New York, although beyond inheriting a good, large estate, and keeping an extremely tight hold on it, he had never done anything to distinguish himself. He was a representative of one of the old New York families—a member of the old-time aristocracy which affects to look down upon our modern millionaires, as if money made in the codfish or fur-trade a hundred years ago was any better than the wealth acquired yesterday in trade and speculation.

He was called general—why, no one ever knew, for, to the knowledge of the oldest inhabitants, Gainsworth had never been a member of any military organization. Probably it was on account of his peppery disposition. The general, in person, was a little fat man, standing only about five feet four; but, what he lacked in height, he made up in pomposity; and then, too, in a genteel way, he swore as badly as an army teamster.

Like the Venetian, who had such just cause of complaint against the dusky Moor, one fair daughter had he, and no more, and she was fair, too—a Cleopatra style of beauty, tall, elegant figure, superb face, bewitching manners, and, in fine, was as imposing a girl as all New York could boast.

In society she was an acknowledged queen; for, besides being a beauty, she was her father's sole heiress; so there were a couple of million of good reasons why she should be so attractive to the young men, particularly to those men of easy conscience, who were on the look-out for a rich wife.

But two gentlemen only, of all who courted her smiles, did she favor, and, strange to say, these two were the half-brothers, Rutger and Elbert Van Tromp.

Old Van Tromp and the general had been on intimate terms for many years, and therefore, as children, the young folks had been well acquainted, and when the girl blossomed out into a society belle, with half New York at her feet, the two brothers did not fail to press their claims.

And it was noticed that she very much preferred the society of either one of the two to that of other suitors.

Then came the blow which deprived the half-brothers of a father, robbed Rutger of the inheritance which he had no reason to think could be taken from him, and enriched Elbert with an estate which, in his wildest dreams, he never believed would come to him.

"Now," said the world, always cold, calculating and cruel, "Alida Gainsworth will have very little difficulty in making up her mind," for, according to the opinion of the world, there couldn't be the least doubt which was the better of the two.

Rutger, poor, was not to be spoken of as the equal of Elbert, rich.

Not that the world "cut" the disinherited man, for, thanks to his annuity, he never need be afraid of poverty; but, though he had an in-

come sufficient to support a single man comfortably, yet to marry such a girl as Alida Gainsworth, and expect her to live as she would have to live, was ridiculous.

This was the opinion of "the world," and what the world thought the old general always believed. To him, society's will was law.

He had had a great many discussions with his daughter upon this subject—pitched battles, some of these resembled—for Alida had a will of her own; and, being independently wealthy in her own right, through her deceased mother, she was extremely willful at times.

It was late in the afternoon, and the general and his daughter sat by the parlor windows watching the endless stream of carriages rolling by.

The general had been silent regarding the rival suitors for two or three days. He had been signally worsted in the last encounter and did not care to provoke another.

Rutger, with a couple of his friends, had just gone by, and had lifted his hat upon passing, a salute to which Alida had replied with her sweetest smile.

The general watched her closely, and growled under his snow-white mustache, which, with a peaked chin beard, he wore in the German military fashion.

"Bah!" he muttered between his teeth; "hang me if she don't bow as politely to that beggar as though he was a president of a railroad."

In the general's opinion every man was a beggar who wasn't worth a million or two.

Oh, the contemptible pride of wealth—the pusillanimity of the money-worshiper!

Then Elbert passed by, behind his trotter—a beast warranted to beat 2:24, and whose stable was more sumptuously furnished than one-half of the houses in the city.

He bowed, and again Alida smiled in return, and again the general watched her with the eye of a hawk.

"Bah! she is not a bit more gracious to him than to the other, and that fellow can write his check for a hundred thousand any time. Deuced fine fellow, too; enjoys a good story and always laughs in the proper places."

Like Richelieu, the general had his weak point. He had several ancient and fish-like stories which he inflicted upon all acquaintances who could be induced to submit to the infliction; Elbert, politic and crafty, always submitted like a hero, but Rutger, always frank and aboveboard, could not listen in patience, and so, with some plausibly designed excuse, escaped; but the general was not deceived. He knew that the young man did not enjoy the recital, and so cherished resentment against him on this account.

"Well, there you have seen both of them; now, Alida, is there really any comparison between the two?"

"Between who?" asked the spoiled beauty, in the languid tone common to her. She knew well enough, but she liked to tease her father on that particular topic.

"Grape and canister!" exclaimed the old warrior—of the home-guards, "you know well enough—the two rivals, ha, ha!" and the old fellow grinned; "as if there could be any rivalry between them."

"Yes, I agree with you; there is no comparison between them; Rutger is incomparably the nicest of the two."

"Oh, by all the gods of war!" cried the general, fairly exploding; "how can you say such a thing?"

"Because I think it."

"Bah! it isn't possible!"

"But it is," the girl persisted. "Rutger is much the nicer-looking, and though he is not so polished in manners as Elbert, yet I am inclined to think that that extra polish is like veneer put on to conceal what is beneath. I have a suspicion that upon occasion he could play the tyrant to perfection."

"Oh, nonsense; that is simply ridiculous! He is as fine a young man as there is in New York, to-day—a really superb young man, and, just think—he is wealthy, well able to keep a wife, while the other one is as poor as a pensioner."

"Did you know that Rutger writes for the magazines and papers?"

"Stuff! Nonsense! He can't write!" growled the general.

"Oh, yes he can! a really beautiful piece of poetry in one, and a charming little love sketch in another. Who knows but what he may make a fortune with his pen one of these days?"

"My dear child, that is utterly absurd. Nobody ever makes any money by writing nowadays; in fact, there isn't one man out of a thousand who writes for a living who succeeds in making more than a bare livelihood. Authorship is the poorest trade going. Oh, I have met a lot of them in my time, and I never knew one of them who wasn't always wanting to borrow ten dollars. Poor devils, I always pitied them."

"Did you ever lend the ten dollars, pa?"

"No, my dear; I never had any money to throw away; but come now, seriously—which one of the two do you prefer?"

"Well, seriously, pa, I like Rutger much the

best, but I will own frankly that I don't think I love him well enough to give up the comfort and luxury to which I have always been accustomed."

"But the other one could give you everything your heart can desire!" assured the old general, craftily.

"Yes, that is very true, but, the more I think of it the less I seem to like him; day by day he grows further and further from me. It is only fancy, and I suppose that I shall get over it in time."

The general was silent and the girl relapsed into a reverie. Love and pride had chosen her heart for a battle-ground, and which would win was a question not easily answered then.

CHAPTER V. THE CAPTURE.

NEVER was a surprise more complete, for not the slightest suspicion had the Gipsies, so carefully had the detective disguised himself, and so excellently had he played the part which he had assumed.

But that threatening revolver and the stern command rudely roused the tent-dwellers from their sense of security. A foe was in their camp, and by all odds the most dangerous one who had visited them for many a long day.

The tableau of surprise lasted but a moment, though, for the man who had been concealed beneath the robe roused himself in a sulky sort of way, just as if he had been awakened from a sound sleep, and blinked his eyes after the fashion of an owl brought suddenly from the darkness into the light.

"Eh? What—what is the matter?" and then suddenly he appeared to catch sight of the revolver leveled at his head.

"Hullo, hallo!" he cried in alarm; "what are you about? Don't point that pistol at me! I ain't done nothing to nobody! Don't shoot a man without warning, for Heaven's sake!"

But Joe Phenix did not relax his menacing attitude. He knew the bird with whom he had to deal too well. If the man was the notorious Captain Molly, as he felt certain, no more desperate, determined and cunning rogue ever felt the halter of the law draw tightly around him.

"Come, come, no nonsense!" warned the detective, sternly. "I want you, and I don't want any fuss about the matter, either. I am Joe Phenix; possibly you may have heard of me. Sing Sing is lonely since you gave leg-bail so cleverly, and the warden misses you so much that he has deputed me to hunt you up, and when I get my grapples upon a man I generally take him, alive or dead. You can decide which it shall be, in your case. Will you put out your hands quietly for the bracelets, or will you resist and take the consequence?"

The detective's manner carried conviction of danger, and not one within the sound of his voice doubted but that he would be as good as his word if put to the test.

Even the three Gipsies without the tent, who had listened at the entrance, were disconcerted and alarmed.

"For God's sake, stranger, don't fire! Don't murder me in cold blood!" the Gypsy cried, with increased alarm.

"You are not in the slightest danger so long as you submit to come along quietly with me," Phenix replied. "But I say, my friend, don't speak in quite so loud a tone; you give me an idea that you are endeavoring to rouse your sleeping camp, so that I may have trouble to get you out. But I warn you and your companions not to try any games, for my men are not a hundred yards away, ready at the first signal of danger. I never disturb a hornet's nest, you know, without making provision against being stung; so if you are wise you will come along quietly. I hate to do this sort of thing, of course; it isn't agreeable to seize hold of a free man and throw him into jail, but such things must be done; there must be blood-hounds, you know, and it is my misfortune, not my fault, if fortune has ordained that I shall lead the life of a man-catcher."

"Sir, upon my word, I don't know what you are talking about!" exclaimed the pretended Gypsy, sitting upright and presenting an appearance of complete innocence.

"Come, come, I say!" again warned Phenix, sharply, "we are wasting time; get up and come along with me."

"This must be all a mistake," protested the man, rising to his feet as he spoke and with a very injured sort of expression upon his face.

"Well, you can explain that to the warden from Sing Sing; he is over in New York waiting for you now. Of course, if you are not the man he won't want you and you will be released at once."

"But, so help me! I didn't steal the horse. I bought it honestly of another man and paid good honest money for it. I bought it to sell, of course, and I did sell it the moment I saw a chance to turn an honest penny, and if the beast was stolen, I didn't know anything about it, for the man swore to me that he raised it from a colt, and what reason had I to think that he was lying? He was a stranger to me; I never saw him before but met him just by

chance coming along the road with the horse. I thought he looked as if he wanted to trade, so I asked him if the beast was for sale and he said it was, and we struck up a bargain. I paid him honest money and took the horse; then he went his way and I went mine. I have never seen him since, and I don't know any more where I could find him than the child unborn. As soon as I got a customer I sold the horse, and I only made ten dollars for my trouble; but, that is neither here nor there. If it was the gentleman's horse, and he can prove it, why, I am sorry that I had anything to do with the beast. I'll give back the money and that is all I can do, and I am a poor man, too, and can ill-afford to be at the loss, but I am ready to do anything that is right so that the gentleman will say that I am an honest man; but, as for the other fellow, who, of course, lifted the horse, why he got off with my money fast enough after he palmed the beast onto me and he won't be fool enough to let me or anybody else catch him; but I will give up the money like an honest man for I don't mean to wrong any one."

And the fellow rattled this long explanation off with such great readiness that it seemed as if it was an oft told tale with him.

A smile crept over the face of the detective as the man finished.

"You are a genius," he remarked, with an approving nod. "So far you are a leetle ahead of any man that I ever put my grapples on, but you can explain all about this horse, you know, at head-quarters, New York; they will straighten out the matter for you finely, and if you choose to come with me in the guise of a man who has got into a little trouble about the ownership of a horse, well and good; it don't matter a pinch of salt to me how you come, so long as I get you where I want you."

"But if it isn't a horse, what is—what do you want me for?" the man demanded.

"On a much more serious charge," Phenix replied, in his grave way. "I take it that you are Captain Molly, the master-thief, the cutest rascal who has ever broken through the meshes of the law. Even Sing Sing couldn't hold you, but the warden up there is anxious to get another chance at you and so he has employed me to hunt you down; so hold out your hands for the bracelets, if you please, and come along with me like a gentleman. It will be all the better for you if you do so, for you are in the snare and the more you struggle the worse it will be for you."

"But it is all a mistake!" the man protested, earnestly, and great drops of perspiration began to appear on his forehead, like so many little waxen beads.

"What is the use of wasting words? You are my man, Captain Molly, and I mean to take you, if I have to fight all this Gypsy camp," warned Phenix.

"This man is our brother. Why should you tear him from us when he says that he is not the person you want?" asked the queen, turning her large dark eyes full upon the face of the detective, and Phenix, man of ice and iron that he was, could not help thinking that he had never beheld a more beautiful pair of eyes.

"I take him because I believe he is the man I want," Phenix answered. "Of course he denies that he is—that is natural; any man would do so under the circumstances, but, unfortunately, I haven't sufficient confidence in his veracity to believe him. I am sure he is Captain Molly, for the master thief has Gypsy blood in his veins, and I know how it is with you Gipsies; blood with you is a great deal thicker than water. This man has come to your camp, claimed kindred and protection, and you have accorded it to him, but I must take him all the same. The fact is, old fellow, a pal has betrayed you; but for him I should never have thought of looking for you here."

Despite the really wonderful control which the other had over his features, he could not repress the fierce gleam of light that appeared suddenly in his eyes as he listened to the detective's announcement, but he covered it up well, though, for with a half-laugh, which more resembled the drawing back of the lips of the cat showing the white teeth beneath than anything else, he extended his hands toward the detective.

"Here, snap on the ornaments if you like, but I tell you I am not the man, and if any one has said that I was, why, instead of a pal it is only some enemy who is trying to get me into trouble."

For a moment the detective, crafty and shrewd as he certainly had proved himself to be, was puzzled. If it was acting, it was the most superb thing of the kind that had ever come under his notice, the real thing.

But, it was Joe's business to take the man, not to listen to his explanations; his innocence or guilt was to be decided by a higher tribunal than his opinion.

"That is right; keep a stiff upper lip," Phenix remarked, approvingly, as he drew the shining handcuffs from his pocket and stepped forward to adjust them upon the outstretched wrists, still taking the precaution, however, to keep him covered with the threatening tube of the revolver.

But, shrewd and cunning as was the detective—incomparable as were his abilities in the man-catching line, for once in his life he had not calculated as correctly as he might have done. As he had remarked he had ventured into a hornets' nest, and now, as he stepped forward to secure his prisoner, the hornets swarmed around him.

CHAPTER VI.

A CHANGE OF POSITIONS.

THE Gipsy had been talking to gain time, until the camp could be aroused by the watchers without, and these, with the utmost haste but quietly as the snake glides over the ground had stolen from tent to tent and roused the slumbering men. It was enough that a minion of the law was in their camp; the Romany faith of brother to brother compelled them to act, even for the defense of one they despised, seeing that he was of their blood. So the Romany men gathered around the tent like bees attracted by a lump of sugar, and as Phenix reached forward to snap the steel bracelets upon the wrists of the Gipsy, like hungry tigers the Egyptians sprung upon him.

Phenix was borne by the rush headlong to the earth, yet with the strength apparently of a giant, he shook himself almost loose from their grasp and rose to his feet, shaking his foes off with a great sweep of his muscular arms.

The revolver having been knocked from his hand in the fall, he was obliged to depend upon the weapons which nature had given him. With the skill, ease and force of the practiced boxer he swung out his powerful right fist and his left, dropping three or four of his assailants, but a half-dozen powerful and lithe fellows pounced upon him and he was once more borne to the earth. But again he arose, with resistless strength, and dealt such awful blows at the amazed Gipsies that, though there were ten of the Egyptians against him, the issue of the struggle would have been extremely doubtful, if Captain Molly—if it was Captain Molly—had not stolen behind the detective and with Phenix's own revolver, which he had picked from the ground, dealt him a most terrible thump on the back of the head with the butt of the weapon. Phenix staggered forward, grasped wildly at the air and then fell heavily, face downward, stunned.

The victory was won, and, breathless and bleeding—for nearly every one of the Egyptians had suffered some damage in the fight, so desperate had been the struggle—the victors stood and gazed upon the prostrate foe whose conquest had cost them so much trouble.

A cry of alarm came from the queen as she shrunk into the furthest extremity of the tent, when the stranger staggered and fell.

"Hold, hold! Do not kill him!" she cried.

"I had to do it!" replied the man with the pistol, his face now strangely white and wet with perspiration. "He is a devil! Never in all my life did I see a man possessed of such strength. We are but as boys compared to him. If I had not struck him down he would have beaten us."

"Is he dead?" the queen asked, anxiously.

"Bah, dead? He has a skull like an ox!" returned the Gipsy, contemptuously.

"Thank the stars for that!" the girl exclaimed, solemnly. "Not for all the gold in this world, nor all the diamonds that lie hidden in the earth, would I have this man's death lie at our door. He is a Hercules and our enemy; and if my presentiments do not deceive me, it will be an evil hour for us when he entered our camp."

"The evil can be removed by removing the man," the Gipsy remarked, with a vicious look at the senseless detective, and as he spoke he drew a knife from his bosom.

"No, no!" cried the girl, the accent of command in her voice.

"We must decide in council what is best to be done," old Lemuel observed, who rather resented the idea that the visitor should take it upon himself to make any suggestion at all.

"As you please, of course, but the easiest way is the best to my thinking in all cases like this," the other replied, sullenly. "This man has entered our camp in disguise; he came as a foe—came alone, confident that, single-handed, he could cope with all of us, which proves what a desperado he is. Now, when such a man gets on our track, what is to be done with him except to silence him forever?"

"Not on our track—on yours he came!" the old Gipsy interposed.

"What difference does it make?" demanded the young man, angrily. "Am I not a true Romany—a brother—and does not the man who attacks me attack all of you, also?"

"Let us discuss that point in council," the black-bearded Gipsy hastened to say, perceiving that old Lemuel was about to make an angry reply. "The children of Egypt, in all matters appertaining to the general weal, give even the humblest member of the tribe a right to say his say."

"Well, my way is to cut the claws of the cat when I am afraid that the beast will scratch,

but of course I will yield to the general will," the young man assented, sulkily. That he would have put the detective to death if he could have had his way was evident. "But let me suggest," he added, "that you look out for this fellow," and he touched the body contemptuously with his foot. "He won't lay long in this swoon, and unless he is bound hand and foot, the chances are that we will have another desperate fight with him."

The advice was good and the men at once proceeded to carry it out.

"Bind him firmly but hurt him not," the queen ordered, authoritatively.

The young Gipsy's lip curled in scorn. Much tenderness he would show to the human sleuth! By old Lemuel's orders the detective was carried to the old man's tent where the Gipsies left him, while every member of the tribe was summoned in council to the tent of the queen.

Once assembled, old Lemuel, as the oldest of the tribe, opened the proceedings:

"Children of the race of Egypt," he said, in grave and measured tones, "according to the custom of two thousand years we have assembled in council to decide upon a measure which intimately concerns every one here. A stranger—a house-dweller, ay, worse even than a house-dweller—a bloodhound of the house-dwellers' law has penetrated in disguise to our camp; he comes in quest of our brother, 'The Kinchen,' whom he seeks to drag away that he may answer to the house-dweller's law for the crimes which he has committed against it."

"Lemuel, let me speak one word," interrupted the young Gipsy, whom he had referred to as "The Kinchen," and who had been the cause of all the trouble.

"Go on if it is necessary that you should speak."

"As my brethren know, I am a Gipsy," the Kinchen began, "and it is my pride and boast that I am a true Romany; never yet have I been false to my race, although nearly all my life has been spent amid the house-dwellers, but that was because my father took service with them—not to serve them, though, but to serve himself."

"Your father needs no word to commend him. Egypt never had a truer son," old Lemuel remarked, gravely.

"And what my father was I trust to be!" the young man declared. "I am not old, and have not been as constant in my intercourse with my tribe as I might have been, but that is because, owing to my father's position, my life has been chiefly spent among the house-dwellers."

"We have seen you often, though, in the last ten years," Lemuel suggested, his face as impassable as marble.

"Oh yes, I have visited my people when I could—when it was convenient."

"When the law-dogs were snapping at your heels."

"Of course; where else should a man seek shelter except among his kindred?" the young man responded, with assurance.

"In England we saved you, time after time, and now here in this new land again you seek our tents and again the dogs follow you. Saving the claim of kindred, what right have you to come to us, and by so doing bring danger upon our heads?"

"Is there a Romany among ye all who would be base enough to deny me shelter when I come to claim it as a son of Egypt?" cried the young man, appealingly.

The silence of the dark, scowling faces before him was an ominous answer for the speaker; he saw that he could hardly count upon a friend in the circle, and so came at once to the point which he had determined to make when he had begun his speech.

"I am very sorry to have brought trouble upon my brethren, but in this case I am not to blame; I am not the man that this bloodhound is after."

Not a soul of them all believed his words, and so expressed it in their looks.

"Why not give yourself up then and go with him?" asked old Lemuel. "If you are not the man you have nothing to fear; the mistake will be discovered and they will let you go."

"Oh, will they?" the other cried, scornfully; "will they not be glad to hold a son of Egypt whether guilty or not guilty? What justice can a Romany expect at the hands of the house-dwellers?"

For the first time the man had made an impression. The belief that a house-dweller will always wrong a Gipsy if he possibly can, is one of the deepest rooted ideas of this peculiar people; ages of oppression, and thousands of acts of cruelty practiced by the "strangers" upon the children of Bohemia, had burnt the maxim deep into their souls. No justice for the Romany from the dwellers within walls.

"No, I will not give myself up, but I will fly and never again will I trouble the tents of my people except in the hour of direst need, but I will still be a true son of Egypt, and my heart and hand will ever be open to assist my brethren."

"It is a wise decision," old Lemuel remarked.

"Take another name from that by which you have been known; disguise your person, and as

you progress through the world may you prosper as your merits deserve!"

"Then all I ask of you, my brothers, as a parting favor, is not to let this bloodhound loose to immediately follow on my track!" cried the Kinchen, earnestly. "Give me at least two or three days' start, so that I can put leagues of land between us, distance enough so that he cannot smell out my track and immediately take the scent again."

"It shall be done."

"Farewell, then, to the Romany camp—perhaps forever!"

All bowed their heads solemnly, and the Kinchen departed.

CHAPTER VII.

PHENIX IN SILKEN BONDS.

THE departure of the Gipsy brother who had brought so much trouble upon the Romany camp still left upon the council a most important and weighty matter. Joe Phenix was in their hands; what on earth should they do with him?

"What is to be done?" queried old Lemuel, a puzzled look upon his face. "The tiger is in our hands, bound and helpless, but who among us is wise enough to say how we shall cut his claws, let him go free and yet escape all harm ourselves?"

A dead silence rested upon the little circle; the puzzle none could solve; but the queen at length spoke:

"Be that my task," she said. "I am akin by blood to the man who was instrumental in bringing this trouble upon our band, and it is only right that I should attempt to remove it."

Old Lemuel nodded approvingly, while the rest looked at the queen with admiration expressed upon their features.

"It is well," the old man remarked; "the wits of the daughters of Egypt have always been as sharp as the knives of the sons of the Romany race."

"I will go to the man instantly, lest, like the genius in the leaden box, grown desperate by long confinement, he may resolve to destroy the kindly hand that breaks his prison bars."

"Go, then, in the name of the Great Spirit who guards the sons and daughters of Bohemia—go, and prosper in your undertaking, and we will await your return here."

The Gipsy queen proceeded direct to the tent to which the detective had been carried. Two armed Gipsies kept watch and ward outside, although the intruder was bound hand and foot so that he could not stir.

Possessing herself of a lantern which one of these guards had with him, she entered the tent.

Joe Phenix lay upon his back, strong cords wound tightly around both his hands and feet, about as helpless as a man could be. He had recovered his senses, though—the effect of the terrible blow which he had received, having passed away; and, as the rays of the light illuminated the narrow confines of the tent, he looked with a cold, passionless face upon the girl.

Despite the fact that he was a most dangerous foe, the heart of the girl was touched by his condition.

"These cords must hurt you terribly!" she exclaimed, setting the lantern down upon the floor and kneeling by the side of the detective.

"They are certainly not as soft as silk nor as pleasant to wear as a lady's bracelets," he replied.

"Can I not loosen them?" and she placed her beautiful hands—dark-skinned though they were—upon the cords.

"To loosen them would be to give me freedom," he warned. "And I presume you are not anxious to do that."

"You are wrong there, for that is the mission upon which I come, only that the freedom must be accompanied by conditions."

"Well, you are in a position to dictate conditions, and I in a fine situation to receive them," and Phenix smiled as he spoke.

"And you are willing to bargain then?" exclaimed the girl, anxiously.

"I should be an idiot not to bargain if I have the chance, considering what a scrape I am in. So propound your conditions."

"Will you be content to remain here for three days if, at the end of that time, we allow you to depart unharmed, and will you agree not to harbor malice against us for having detained you?"

Phenix reflected for a few moments before he replied.

"The three days is to allow time for Captain Molly to escape, eh?" he remarked, at last.

"As to that, the matter is entirely in your own hands. If you choose to keep me a prisoner here for three days, at present I don't see any way by which I can prevent you, so I may as well agree; as to holding malice because the cards in my hand were not so strong as those in yours, or if they were, because I had not wit enough to play them as well, why, that would be foolish. I knew beforehand that it would be no child's play to walk into a Gipsy camp and take out a man if the Gipsies showed fight, but like many a good fellow before me I over-

estimated my prowess and underrated the metal of your fellows; and I was warned, too, that the moment I went for my game all the camp would fall upon me like a lot of wild-cats; but, bless you! I didn't believe it. I've gone into some of the worst places in New York and put the nippers on my man and taken him out right from the midst of his gang, and although they showed their teeth fast and ugly enough, yet they didn't dare to attempt to use them."

"With us Gipsies the tie of kindred is very strong; to save a brother from danger we freely venture blood—even life itself."

"And this Captain Molly is a brother?"

"We know him not by that name."

"You know the man I mean, though."

"He is a brother."

"But not one that is of much benefit to the tribe, I should judge, although you all fought for him as though he was as precious as the apple of one's eye."

"He is a brother and as long as he is not driven in disgrace from the tribe we must protect him."

"And he demanded three days' grace—"

"I did not say that."

"No, but I guess that is the truth all the same. Three days, eh? and in three days' time he thinks he can put so much space between us that I will not be able to track him?" and the detective scrutinized the face of the girl, who was upon her knees bending over him, but he might as well have looked into the face of a statue.

Phenix laughed; the girl was fully his match, and his peculiar nature was such that it pleased him when he met with his equal. He enjoyed a contest even if he came out second best.

"Well, well; I have no right, I know, to pry into your secrets; but now, one last question, and of course you need not answer it unless you wish to. This man I assume is a relative of yours?"

"Yes."

"And do you hold him dear?"

The question was answered upon the instant, though word she spoke not, but the look upon her face was enough.

"Aha, you rather hate than love him, although from the likeness which there is between you I should think it was not unreasonable to suppose that you were quite near kindred, brother and sister, perhaps?"

"All the men of the Romany race are my brothers." The reply was evasive, but Phenix judged that his surmise was near the truth.

"I have taken a strange interest in the fellow," the detective declared, "an interest which I am puzzled to account for. Though this is not the first man hunt I have been engaged in, by a score, yet never did I feel so much interest in running a man down. But, I say, why does your tribe harbor such a fellow who can only bring you into trouble?"

"We harbor him no more; he has fled never to return."

"Oh, gone to slip into another skin, eh?" And again Phenix laughed. "But, let him be as cunning and as skillful as he may I will hunt him down although he assumes as many disguises as Proteus himself."

The girl was startled by his fiery energy.

"He has three days' start; you will not be able to overtake him."

"Bah! that is a blind to throw me off the track! He cannot leave the city—he would die out of it; the three days' start is a device to make me look for him elsewhere; like a fox he doubles back upon his track, but I am up to his tricks and before a month is out I will have the darbies upon his wrists, no matter how cunningly he may disguise himself."

The girl listened with a shudder; Phenix seemed as ruthless in his chase as death itself.

"Wash your hands of this man," continued Phenix; "he is no good to himself or to any one else—no good except to fill the compass of a hempen noose. But, our bargain is all right; release me and for three days I will dwell in your tents and learn something of the life you Gipsies lead."

And so the agreement was consummated.

CHAPTER VIII.

WITCH, WIZARD OR FAIRY?

THE reader will perhaps remember a conversation detailed in a preceding chapter between two of the "curled and gilded darlings" of upper-tendom, in reference to a certain girl, who just at the time of which we write was the talk of the city.

New York is prone to run wild at certain times upon certain things, and then to turn its back upon its idol as suddenly as the worship had begun.

Just now Bel Amein was the topic of conversation. She was a dancing-girl who, almost unheralded, had made her appearance at the Academy of Music in a new opera whose scene was laid, as we have said, in an eastern clime. In the first act a troupe of Arab dancing-girls performed one of their wild fantastic dances before the prince, the hero of the tale; he is fascinated by the chief one of the wild maidens and follows her to the desert, where he is captured by the Arabs, and his ad-

ventures with them and his final rescue by the princess who loves him compose the argument of the opera.

Now, the worthy manager of Her Majesty's Opera Company, which troupe of artists now occupied the boards of the Academy of Music, was very much troubled to find a woman to fill the rôle of the Arab maiden. A really great danseuse he did not require, for the wild Arab dance of the desert was simple enough, but he did want a girl who would present a wild and picturesque appearance, and so, in order to get the best representative possible for the part, he advertised.

Among the hundred who applied came Bel Amein. The appearance of the girl took the manager's fancy at once. She was exactly suited to the part. She said that she was an Arab, and familiar with all the wild dances of the desert. The manager begged for a private exhibition of her ability. The trial was a thoroughly successful one, and the delighted man of business at once engaged her for the run of the opera. And upon her first appearance the girl scored an instantaneous success. Her dancing was so extremely novel, her appearance so picturesque and beautiful that the audience was captivated immediately, and the obscure dancing-girl at once became quite as much a feature of the opera as either the prima donna or the dashing tenor, either one of whom got as much salary for a night as the girl received in a week.

Almost instantly, as we have said, Bel Amein, as she called herself, became the rage, and with that craft so peculiar to the Eastern race she turned her popularity to good account. In one of the cross streets up-town she rented a modest little house and affixed a small gilt placard upon the outer walls which proclaimed that those who dwelt within were adepts in the arts of the fortune-teller's trade, and that for a certain sum the anxious seeker after knowledge might learn what the future had in store for him.

The idea was a novel one, and Bel Amein prospered as well in this vocation as upon the stage. Of course, from time immemorial, the children of the East have been noted for their skill in star-reading, and this fact being well known brought the fortune-teller an enormous patronage. And then, too, a great many who didn't care two straws about having their fortunes told came out of pure curiosity to see what the dancing-girl looked like in private life, for of course it soon became noised about that Bel Amein, the fortune-teller, and Bel Amein, the danseuse, were one and the same.

It was one of the off nights of the opera and the star-gazer had been well patronized; at ten o'clock the last visitor who had been waiting her turn in the parlor—nearly all of the Arab girl's clients were of the softer sex—had been conducted by the aged man, dressed in dark and flowing robes, who acted as master of ceremonies, to the apartment where the future was revealed; at half-past ten she had departed, and the girl, with a sigh of relief, removed the dark veil which she always wore over her face when giving audience. But, hardly had she done so when there came a violent ring at the door-bell.

The girl did not ply her trade knowing that it was all a trick and a fable and that in truth she was but a sorry charlatan; on the contrary, she had the most abiding faith that she was by nature gifted with the art of reading the future. For hundreds of years her family had been earnest star-gazers, and the science had descended from father to child. The stars foretold future events and the stars lied not—they could not lie, for they were immortal like truth itself.

She believed in presentiments—in warnings, and so when the violent peal of the bell rung through the house, she started and a dark look came over her beautiful face.

"It is a foe!" she cried, impulsively; "I feel that evil approaches."

"Shall we bar the door against the visitor?" asked the old man, who had a firm faith that the girl was a true prophet.

"No! fling wide open the portal and bid our enemy enter. We deprive him of half his strength when we discover who and what he is; it is the hidden danger that is to be feared. The open one we can guard against."

Without a word the attendant hurried to the door; implicit obedience to the will of the superior is the Romany creed.

When the old man opened the door, a tall, dark stranger stood wit out. He had long black hair which fell almost to his coat-collar, and a bushy black beard covered his chin.

"Is the Arab girl—the fortune teller—with-in?" he inquired, in a gruff and husky voice.

With his eyes the old Gips had measured him keenly. Although dressed roughly, something after the fashion of a seafaring man, yet there was a certain something about him which seemed to say that his station in life was rather better than his dress indicated.

"Yes, but it is late," responded the old usher.

"What difference does it make?" exclaimed the man, gruffly. "It is all right so long as she is up and ready for business. I came from

quite a distance just to get my fortune told, and I may not be able to come again."

"Enter; you shall not be disappointed."

The major-domus opened the door widely and the stranger walked in; then after reclosing the door the servitor conducted the visitor to the reception-room.

"Wait here for a few minutes," he said, "while I speak to Bel Amein in regard to your visit."

The old man left the room and the stranger seated himself. The room was oddly furnished after the Eastern style: queer-looking chairs and ottomans, great fleecy rugs, skins of wild beasts, carefully dressed, lined and turned into mats, and the air was full of a strange, incense-like perfume which little by little seemed to intoxicate the senses, producing a drowsy feeling.

With a keen and careful eye the caller had looked around him, his scrutinizing gaze not neglecting a single article in the apartment.

"The trick is complete," he muttered, sneeringly, under his breath, after he had completed his scrutiny. "Ten minutes' exposure to the fumes of the powerful Eastern drug would be apt to so muddle the senses that any visitor would be ready to believe anything that was told."

And though the stranger had discovered the secret of the reception-room, yet so powerful was the subtle influence of the drug that he had hard work to resist yielding to it.

But, acute in wit as the man was, he had not penetrated all the secrets of this reception-room.

The odd furnishing—the powerful perfume, were all designed to impress the mind of the seeker after knowledge with a sense of awe and so bring his mind to a proper state to receive the decrees of the oracle, but the delay in the room, to which every visitor was subjected, was for another purpose also. In the rear wall of the apartment was a secret closet, admittance to which was gained from the entry, and in the wall were peep-holes so arranged that any one in the closet could command a full view of the reception-room.

Confident as was the Arab girl in the power of the stars, still she did not disdain to help them along a little with earthly craft.

And while the stranger was surveying the curiosities of the apartment, the Arab girl and the old man in the secret closet were earnestly watching their caller, for the servitor had been careful to place a chair for the man so that the full light of the gas-lamp should fall directly upon his face.

Long and earnestly looked the two upon their visitor, and in cautious whispers they exchanged confidences.

"Daughter, what think you of him?" the old man queried.

"He is a foe—one who comes to do me harm."

"Do you know him?"

"No, not in his disguise."

"You think that he is disguised?"

"No doubt."

"It was my own thought. The beard is false."

"The hair also, and he has darkened his eyebrows. Black is not their natural hue; they are light. Can you not see how unnatural the skin looks. He should have changed the color of the complexion to correspond with the hair."

"No doubt, no doubt he is in disguise!" the old man assented, in a tone of conviction. "But, what does it mean?"

"Danger!"

"But why and wherefore? What is this man to us or we to him?"

"I cannot guess now, but I will know before he leaves this house this night," responded the girl, with compressed lips and a firm determination shining in her eyes.

"Is there any danger that we may need assistance?"

"Oh no; still, it will not be amiss to prepare the incense which we offer to the nostrils of our enemies, although I do not think we shall have occasion to use it."

"And when the drugs are prepared, am I to conduct him to you?"

"Yes, on the instant."

The two quitted the closet—the girl to seek the consultation chamber and prepare for the reception of the visitor whom her instinct warned her was a foe, and the old man to arrange the mysterious drugs of which they had spoken, and then to conduct the man to the audience which he had demanded.

CHAPTER IX.

MYSTERY UPON MARVEL.

THE visitor was beginning to get impatient when the old man made his appearance.

"Well, well, how much longer am I to be kept waiting?" the stranger demanded. "If you treat all customers in this way I doubt your receiving a second visit from any of them."

"It takes time," rejoined the old usher; "the stars are not the slaves of mortals, and when one seeks to gain knowledge from them care and craft are necessary."

The stranger laughed; plainly he put little faith in the statement.

"Well, how much longer will I have to wait

ere the stars will graciously deign to favor me?"

"The daughter of the far East is ready to receive you now if you will please to follow me."

"Go on; I am ready."

Then the old man conducted the stranger to the apartment sacred to the star worship. It was an upper room in the house and nearly all of the back wall was one large window, so arranged that it could be opened and a full view of the star-spangled heavens commanded.

The walls of the apartment were hung with greeny, shining silk, dark blue in hue, after the Eastern custom, and the only furniture that was in the room were a couple of cushioned Turkish divans and a large marble basin full of water—a huge vase, which sat in the center of the apartment, and over the basin swung a hanging lamp burning a perfumed oil that filled the air with a strange, sweet, pungent odor, and the lamp was so arranged that the light fell full upon the water in this basin.

Upon one of the divans, placed close to the window, the Arab girl reclined, her gaze fixed intently upon the starlit heavens without.

She did not pay the slightest attention to the entrance of the two, but sat like one in a trance, staring upward at the sky.

"Wait! Do not interrupt her; she will speak all in good time," the old man whispered to the visitor, and then with noiseless steps he withdrew.

The stranger cast a curious glance around him, then fixed his gaze intently upon the really beautiful girl, poised so gracefully by the casement. She was clad in the loose, flowing robes so common to the daughters of the Orient, and so becoming to womanly beauty, and around her jet-black locks, fine as finest silk, a fleecy turban was twisted.

And as the stranger gazed and admired with eyes that coveted, he thought unto himself that she was the fairest woman his eyes had ever rested upon.

The pungent odor coming from the lamp seemed to grow stronger and stronger and soon the visitor began to feel its potency upon his senses. It was as if some subtle spell was being woven around him. The powerful incense, the strangely-furnished apartment, the girl with her mystic beauty, all was like a scene from some far-off land.

With an effort the man shook off the insidious influences that were dazing his senses. He took a step forward, and although the heavy carpet was so thick in its pile that the sound of a footfall was completely deadened, the girl seemed to have ears as keen as a lynx's, for she turned immediately upon the man, and he, encountering thus suddenly the full gaze of those brilliant black eyes, so full of liquid fire, trembled for a second, evidently under the influence of some powerful passion.

"Your pardon, gentle lady," he said, "for interrupting your meditations, for calling you thus abruptly from heaven to earth, but the peculiar influences of your mystic apartment here are so strange in their effects that I felt as if some powerful spell was being worked upon me, and if I remained quiet longer, all my senses would be taken captive."

"Why do you seek me? What is it you wish to learn?"

"My fortune, if you please. They say you can read the future and tell what is in store for us mortals, and, like most men, I am anxious to know what is before me."

"To read the stars requires time, and I must have the date of your birth, the hour and the minute, so that I may be able to ascertain which planet it is that rules in your house of life."

"Ah, I am not prepared to give you that information; in fact, I very much doubt whether I would be able at any time to ascertain all those facts. The date of my birth I can give you easily enough, but not the hour nor the minute."

"I cannot draw your horoscope correctly, then."

"But, can you not read what is to be my fortune in my hand? Are you not skilled in palmistry?"

"Oh, yes; but that is poor and uncertain information compared to that which the stars can give."

"Well, I will have to be satisfied with it, since it is the best I can obtain. But for what purpose is the water in this marble basin used? Has that ought to do with the decrees of fate?"

"Oh yes, that is a mystic urn; the marble from which it is formed was one of the pillars of King Solomon's great temple—Solomon, the Wise, the greatest king and sage that the Eastern world has ever known, and the water is from the Pool of Siloam."

"And what special properties does this object with so remarkable a history possess?" the stranger asked, in a tone which revealed that he was a doubter—a skeptic.

"If all conditions are favorable, the mystic water will forecast the future," answered the seeress, solemnly.

"How so? I do not understand."

"The water, crystal pure, is as a mirror whereon scenes of the future are depicted."

"Aha! after the style of the old magicians

who, upon a whitened wall, caused pictures to appear."

"I see you are incredulous," remarked the queen, in a low voice, as if not to disturb the mood upon her.

"I am so, I confess, and if I cannot detect the secret of the trick your skill in deception must be wonderful."

"Approach and give me your hand," commanded the girl, imperiously, as though annoyed at the discussion.

The man did so, and as the warm fingers of the girl encircled his hand, which was as cold as ice, a sudden thrill shook his frame.

"Do not fear; I shall not harm you," she said, looking him full in the face with her glorious eyes, and then, on the instant, she penetrated his disguise. The moment she did so, despite her schooled self-control, a shudder shook her slight frame.

The visitor felt the thrill, for his hand was still clasped in that of the seeress, and amazed, he cast an inquiring glance upon her as if to ask the reason of that tremor.

"We of the Eastern race who are gifted with the art of reading the future, are blessed, or cursed, as we may choose to consider it, with a nature that is supersensitive, and which, like the barometer that foretells the changes of the weather, warns us when danger threatens."

The man knitted his brows for a moment and gazed intently into the beautiful face.

"When danger threatens?" he repeated, "and do you mean to imply that danger threatens you from me?"

"Yes, so the subtle instinct of my nature warns me," the girl replied, with a sad, beseeching look into his face.

The frown upon the man's brows deepened.

"Upon my life you wrong me!" he exclaimed. "I am no enemy of yours, nor would I do you harm in any manner, although I will own frankly that I think I have cause to feel aggrieved."

"What have I ever done to you?" demanded the seeress, a touch of surprise and reproof in her voice.

"I ensnared me with those great and glorious eyes!" he answered, taking the girl's hand between his own broad palms, thus making it a prisoner, and looking fixedly into her face. "I have not had any peace since the time when first I saw you—when you bounded upon the stage light as a fawn, and with your strange wild beauty enthralled the vast audience, but among them all I will venture my life that not one was so impressed as I. Sleeping or waking ever since that night your image has been before me, and so, at last, unable to endure the torment, I have sought you, anxious to have the future read so that I may know what is to be the end of this strange, wild, delicious passion."

The girl had trembled like a leaf during the delivery of this impetuous and passionate speech; her eyes sought the ground, and at the close of the outburst when she raised them tears trembled within.

"I cannot tell—I cannot tell!" she exclaimed; "my art may enable me to answer the question, but, alas! I fear the future will appear so indistinct and dim that I will not be able to say what is in store for either of us. But, was my instinct not right when it presaged danger to me from you?"

"Danger—how so?" he demanded. "As I live, I swear to you I would sooner encounter all possible harm than cause you even the slightest anxiety."

"Is it not enough that I am what I am and you what you are?" she replied, instantly.

"Consider for a moment the difference in our position; what can we have in common with each other?"

"But you do not know who I am."

"Do I not? My art can reveal that."

"Proceed then, most beautiful seer! I dare you to the test." And releasing his grasp upon her hand he allowed her to examine his palm.

Slowly and carefully she examined the lines which were so distinctly engraven upon the smooth white surface, the man gazing at her with a look wherein doubt and admiration were strangely blended.

"The lines of your life are easily read," she said, after a careful examination upon the hand.

"That is fortunate; you ought to be able to tell my future easily, then."

"I can; listen and judge. You come of an old New York family, but at an early period of your life you suffered a terrible loss—a loss not easily repaired."

The visitor was astounded, and his face plainly expressed his astonishment.

"Well, well, there is really something in your art, I should judge, or else in some mysterious way you have become possessed of a knowledge of my family affairs and have discovered who I am."

"Right! Call the art a trick when it baffles your comprehension," replied the girl, a touch of scorn in her voice.

"Go on, tell me more and thus turn me from a skeptic into a believer."

"That loss changed the current of your life

into another channel," she continued. "Another attempted to take the place of the one whose loss you suffered, and, though the effort was prompted by a kindly feeling, it was not successful, for such a loss could not be repaired, and from the time of this first great calamity in your life evil fortune has followed you, not exactly near enough to overtake, but still close enough to cast a shadow over your path. If I read the lines truly the one who should have been your nearest friend has been cold, indifferent and cruel, and here are indications of a blow recently delivered by his hand."

"As true as Gospel!" cried the visitor, in a tone of firm conviction. "Why, you are a perfect sorceress, unless you have—as I said before—discovered who I am. If you actually know me then your revelation is not wonderful, for what you have stated is understood by all who know me."

The girl, apparently giving no heed to his speech, had been intently peering at the hand.

"All these things, you say, are known to the world?"

"Yes, and in the time gone by excited a great deal of comment."

"Now I will tell you something which the world does not know—which you do not know or even suspect."

"If you can do that, then I shall believe there is everything in your art."

"This second blow which came so abruptly upon you was a natural sequence to the first and swept away—your fortune, I should judge, for it does not seem to endanger your life at all."

"You are right; my fortune was swept away."

"Apparently, only."

"Apparently," repeated the man. "Oh, no! I wish it was so, but there wasn't any 'apparently' about it. A few strokes of a pen wrought the mischief, and the pen held by one from whom I had no right to expect aught but kindness."

"The blow was a deceptive one—the lines in your hand record that."

"Oh, no; that it was terribly real I have ample proof."

"It is written here in your hand, and these lines never lie to the eye which has the skill to read them, that though your fortune apparently was swept away it still is yours; the blow planned to be struck was withheld at the last moment. Malice is now at work—it is plainly written here—to rob you of that which is yours. You need friends, and powerful ones, too, to work against those who are conspiring against you. You must meet these villains with their own weapons—cunning, craft, deceit and open force. All through your life a foe has walked by your side—a foe the more terrible because he has worn the guise of a friend, and you have trusted him although you must have known, long ago, that he was a snake by nature."

"You are right. By Heaven! your knowledge is marvelous, however you became possessed of it."

"Still a doubter, although you said you would believe if I told you true."

"I have no right to doubt, yet still I do, for I cannot bring myself to believe that you can read all this in the palm of my hand. I must think you have some secret source of information."

"Well, believe or not, as you please, but I implore you to heed my words."

"I will do that most surely."

"You need friends; I can recommend you one who will be of more value to you than a dozen ordinary men."

"The very man I want, then."

"You have probably heard of him—Joe Phoenix, the detective."

"Oh, yes, I have often heard of him; he is counted the greatest of all the New York bloodhounds."

"He is the very man to serve you; tell him frankly and freely all your affairs; do not conceal a single thing from him, and rely fully upon what he says."

"But, what case have I to work upon?" asked the other. "The detective must have some foundation to proceed upon. The will of my father which swept away my property was a regularly executed legal document, although dated some years ago. It would be hopeless to attempt to contest it."

"Do not the lines in your hand say that the blow was repented of before it was given? The purpose was formed but it was not intended to be enforced; how can you tell that there was not a second will executed after the first and which would of course render the first valueless?"

The man was startled.

"Ah, that may be; it is not impossible, but where is it?"

"That is for the detective to discover."

"But, this secret enemy of mine of whom you have spoken, and who more than any one else profits by the second will, may have found the first and have destroyed it."

"The lines in your hand say that it is not so; believe the lines: they never lie. And now I will give you a further proof that my art is not

the trick which you believe it to be, despite the fact that I have told you truths which you cannot gainsay."

Releasing her clasp upon the young man's palm she waved her hand in the air, evidently as a signal.

Immediately the lamp commenced to burn dimly and the apartment grew dark, but the water in the marble basin became illuminated like a window with a light placed behind it.

"Now then, you shall see the workings of the magic pool, oh scoffer!" the girl exclaimed. "Think of a face—the face of some one long dead, and if I do not show the image in the water of the pool then call me a trickster and a cheat."

For a moment the young man was fairly staggered; the offer was too marvelous to seem possible that the promise could be fulfilled.

"Come, doubter; think, speak, and you shall see!" cried the girl, in scornful accents, finding that the visitor hesitated.

"If you can do this, it really surpasses all belief," he replied. "I will make the trial, although if you fail I shall not be surprised, for, marvelous as have been your surprises, so far, yet it does not seem possible for you to accomplish the impossible."

"Have you thought of the face?"

"I have; but I defy you to reproduce it!"

"Defy not, but bow humbly before the magic!" Again the girl waved her hand; a strange, sense-entrancing perfume floated through the room, the light faded from the surface of the water in the marble basin and the room was plunged into almost inky darkness.

"Draw near the basin, but not too close, and look down upon it," commanded the seeress.

The young man did so, and then in a low and solemn voice the girl began an invocation.

"Oh, great Solomon! mighty spirit of the East! greatest of kings, wisest of sages! deign to listen to the voice of one of the humblest of your daughters, and by the exercise of thy power cause to appear upon the surface of this magic water the image which this stranger bears in his mind!"

His eyes were fixed anxiously upon the surface of the water; little by little the darkness which rested thereon vanished, and soon he could discern the outlines of a face; clearer and clearer the face grew, while the stranger watched it with breathless attention.

Suddenly, the mist which partially obscured the surface of the water vanished, and the face of a rather pretty, blue-eyed, blonde-haired woman was distinctly visible.

"Saints in heaven, it is my mother!" the young man cried, in startling tones.

And, truly enough, the face of Rutger Van Tromp's first wife was mirrored in the lucid water!

But, as if the voice of the young man had broken the spell, upon the instant the face vanished and total darkness veiled the room.

"By Heaven, this is most extraordinary!" the young man declared.

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER MORE POTENT THAN THE FIRST.

"But it is a trick, for all!" the young man declared.

A soft sigh, hardly audible—more like the whispering of the wind than anything else—the wind sighing, as it often sighs at nightfall through the branches of some leafy oak—was the only reply.

"I have deeply offended her," the young man muttered to himself; "a pest upon my foolish tongue! All through my life it has always been my enemy. Will I never learn to keep a guard upon it?"

For a few moments the stranger remained quiet, thinking that the girl would speak, but as she did not he put the question which was in his mind:

"What else now—what other astonishing thing have you to show me?"

And then, though his ears had not detected the sound of footsteps within the room, a firm grasp was laid upon his arm; no woman's touch but the gripe of a manly hand.

"Nothing; all is over," responded a voice, and the young man at once recognized the aged servitor.

"All is over," repeated the visitor, mechanically.

"Yes, for the present; my mistress bade me tell you to seek the aid of the detective officer whom she mentioned—"

"Joe Phenix?"

"The same; tell him all, frankly and freely; make him your father-confessor; conceal nothing from him, and when he is placed in possession of the facts, leave his shrewd wits to work; but if the trail is blind and indistinct—if it is impossible for him to follow it, then you are to come here again."

A question was burning upon the young man's tongue, but for once in his life he choked back the words.

Why should the girl take such an interest in him?

But, in place of the heart-absorbing question which he longed to put, he asked a very plain, prosaic one, indeed:

"Do you know aught of this Joe Phenix and where he can be found?"

"Yes, I know him well; he is a human bloodhound, whose scent is marvelous, whose patience is untiring, whose courage is so great that, lion-like, he knows not the taste of fear. To track the guilty man—to hunt the villain through all the mazes of his devious windings has become like a second nature; he is a thief-taker—because it is his nature; he could not very well be anything else. He has a regular office down-town, but if you seek for him there you will not find him; for three days he is to remain secluded from the world."

"It will be three days then before I can see him?"

"A powerful star sits in your house of life, and obstacles which would baffle ordinary men you may overleap. Seek the Gipsy camp on the other side of the North river, just back of Guttenberg, and there in the tents of the Romany you will find the great thief-taker. Any one in that neighborhood will direct you to the spot. But mind; one promise the seeress who has opened your eyes exacts from you."

"Certainly, a dozen if she likes; I cannot be too grateful for the information which she has given me."

"Youth is prodigal with promises, age is more cautious," remarked the old man. "Never promise anything until you know what it is, so will you not have to keep a disagreeable vow, nor break an impossible one."

"I have faith that Bel Amein will exact neither the one nor the other," the visitor replied, with perfect candor.

"Trust no one," cautioned the old man.

"The promise that Bel Amein raised you to give is that you will not breathe to a single soul, not even to your dearest friend—not even to the woman you love—nor to the detective officer upon whom all your hopes will be placed, a single particle of what has transpired here to-night."

"Willingly will I give the promise; not a single word in regard to it shall pass my lips."

"It is well, and come not here again until you are baffled and beaten in your search and at your wits' end; then seek for assistance and you shall receive it."

"It is a hard task that you have imposed upon me, but for the sake of Bel Amein I agree."

"And you will be watched over as the stars watch over the earth by night, by eyes that never sleep!" cried the clear voice of the girl, ringing out with all the musical tones of a silver bell. "No danger shall come near thee, no foes assail thee; from false friends and open enemies alike you shall be protected!"

"One moment, Bel Amein! Pray let me have speech with you again."

"It cannot be at present; farewell!"

There was the faint tinkle of a distant bell. The old man's grasp upon the visitor's arm grew firmer.

"Move not for your life," the servitor cautioned.

The young man wondered, but held his peace. The very floor beneath his feet seemed to tremble and he felt a peculiar sensation as if he was gradually sinking. It lasted but for a moment, however.

Then there was a sudden flash of light, and lo! he found himself standing in the main entry, his gaze fixed upon the front door, the old man by his side. Truly, this was a house of surprises.

The man looked about him, but not the slightest sign was there to show how the trick had been accomplished, so cleverly had the machinery been arranged.

"Depart in the name of Heaven, and may great good luck follow you in all your undertakings."

"Farewell! But what am I to pay?"

"Pay!" cried the aged man, with a scornful accent. "We take not money from the hand of a friend; rather, if you need money to fight your battles, come to us and your wants shall be supplied."

"Upon my word I know not what I have done to deserve such friends!" the visitor exclaimed, as he opened the door to depart. The presence of a man upon the door-steps without, ascending with the evident intention of ringing the bell, cut short the speech, for the young man at once had recognized the new-comer, but, thanks to the disguise which he wore, he in turn was not recognized. He started, though, upon perceiving the other, but quickly recovered his composure, passed down the steps and walked briskly away.

The aged servitor standing in the doorway had also recognized the new-comer, and remained in the entrance so as to bar the way.

"What is it you wish?" he asked.

"I want my fortune told."

"It is too late to-night; come some other time."

"No other time will do," answered the young man, roughly, and with the well-bred insolence of the man of money.

"Some other time must do," answered the old man, firmly.

"But I tell you it won't," the other retorted.

"I have set my mind upon having my fortune told to-night, and to-night it must be. I can afford to pay, and will pay liberally."

"We want not your money," was the calm reminder.

"You are determined then not to admit me?"

"Yes."

And then just as the caller with a muttered curse turned upon his heel, there rose on the air the tinkle of a little bell.

"Stay!" cried the old man, abruptly, "you can come in, although I warn you not to, for you will hear unpleasant truths."

"Be that my risk!" cried the other, haughtily, as he entered the portal.

CHAPTER XI.

A HOUSE OF SECRETS.

THE visitor was conducted to the reception-room and there requested to wait until the seeress was ready to receive him.

"Very well," remarked the young man, in his haughty and arrogant way, "but don't keep me here all night. I understand all about this mummerly, and it doesn't make the slightest impression upon me," and as he spoke he cast a contemptuous glance around.

"You will not have long to wait; evil tidings travel fast and misfortune and disaster ever come too quickly," responded the old man, in solemn tones, but the young man only laughed contemptuously.

"That is right!" he exclaimed; "go for me! I am a skeptic and an unbeliever, and since you have made up your minds to dish me up a bad fortune, make it as strong as you can."

"The stars speak and our daughter but translates the signs which she reads in the heavens. Neither gold nor love can buy a good fortune or turn away an evil one," and the aged servitor with a courtly salutation left the room.

Seeing a huge arm-chair, heavily cushioned after the Turkish fashion, in the center of the apartment, the caller sat down in the luxurious chair with a lazy indifference.

The air of the apartment was heavy with the pungent perfume which had so impressed the other visitor, that evening, and the occupant of the chair had not been long in his seat before he was conscious that a languor was stealing over him, a drowsiness, pleasant, soothing, but also dangerous.

"Curse that infernal incense!" muttered the visitor, moving restlessly, endeavoring to shake off the subtle influence. "I shall go to sleep the first thing I know."

And then, while struggling against this unaccountable desire to sleep, his eyes, wandering restlessly around the apartment, became fixed upon a certain point in the wall opposite. This wall was covered with oddly designed paper, whereon strange birds, beasts, insects and fishes intermixed with Egyptian and Chinese hieroglyphics appeared, and the visitor examining these unusual figures soon became possessed of the idea that a pair of dark and brilliant eyes were glaring at him from the wall.

At first he thought that it was but a trick of his vision, but continuing his gaze, he became certain that some one was watching him through an aperture in the wall, with such a pair of eyes, too, as no one but the Arab dancing-girl, Bel Amein possessed—dazzling, dark and penetrating.

And then to his mind came the remembrance of the wager with Clinton Livingston—five thousand dollars that he would win the Arab girl! He had made that bet with not the slightest doubt of easily winning the wager. His acquaintance with the beauties of the ballet had been both an extensive and expensive one, and having obtained the favorable consideration of the light-hearted and light-heeled French girls, he had nothing doubted that Bel Amein would be as easily approached, but, to his surprise, all his advances had been scornfully repulsed. His flowers and gifts had been refused, or, if he had managed to get them placed in her possession they were immediately returned to him, and so, at last, concluded that he had, indeed, lost his money, and besides had the mortifying consciousness that Livingston would chuckle over his victory; and so, as a last desperate resource, he had sought the girl in her fortune telling lair.

So far he had succeeded; he had gained admittance, but had no reason to boast of his reception.

And now as he sat, staring at those eyes motionless as a statue, the magnetic orbs, aided by the powerful incense which so permeated the apartment, began to exercise a subtle influence over him; he felt that he was being magnetized—lulled into insensibility; gradually he was conscious that his powers were leaving him, and that he was becoming helpless, passionless, submissive.

He attempted to spring to his feet, knowing that the movement must break the spell, but to his surprise he could not move! He was a prisoner, bound with chains—fettered in veritable steel!

The great arm-chair was a cleverly devised piece of mechanism. Bands of steel, covered with soft plush so as to hide the hard gripe of the metal, had sprung forth from the foot rest

and secured both ankles; similar bands at the end of the cushioned arms confined the wrists, and two more from the back of the chair invested the arms just below the elbows!

Great drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead, as, with all his strength he attempted to break the bonds which fettered him, but the effort was as fruitless as though he had attempted to lift the house from its foundations; he could only gasp and stare—stare at the eyes in the wall, which seemed to shine now with a truly baleful light, as though exulting over his helpless condition.

The powerful perfume grew stronger and stronger, until, at last, the room was filled with a cloud-like vapor, stupefying in its influence, and ere long the man sunk into insensibility. He was utterly in the power of those whom he had come to brave.

How long he remained in this state he knew not, but when he recovered his senses he found that he was in another apartment, an upper chamber evidently, for, through the huge skylight which composed one-half of the ceiling, he could see the heavens wherein a myriad of stars shone.

This room was dimly lighted by a lamp of ancient design suspended from the ceiling, over a large marble basin of water, as we have described in a preceding chapter, for this was the room wherein the interview between the disguised man and the beautiful seeress had taken place.

As young Van Tromp slowly recovered the use of his senses and could look around, he found that he was seated in a common wooden arm-chair and perfectly free from all restraint.

The Arab girl, clad in loose and flowing robes, stood leaning upon the marble basin, gazing inquiringly upon him.

For a few moments the young man stared around him in a helpless sort of way, unable to understand why such a trick had been played upon him—why he had been made a prisoner and then released, both equally without reason. Was it not all an illusion—a delusion?

No! The pressure of the steel bands were yet upon his wrists; so desperately had he attempted to free himself, that, padded as they had been, they had discolored the flesh.

It was all a solemn reality; and he turned to the girl for an explanation.

CHAPTER XII.

ENLISTED.

THE wronged heir of the Van Tromp estate was quick to act upon the advice given him by the old servitor who kept the keys to the oracle's gates. Naturally impulsive, he always went straight ahead; to him the shortest way was the best; and so, on the very next morning after his interview with the Arab maiden, he proceeded to hunt up the Gipsy camp on the opposite bank of the Hudson.

He had no trouble in finding the encampment, for the fame of the Romanys had spread far and wide, as the present camp was the largest that ever had been pitched in the neighborhood.

But upon reaching the tents and inquiring for the famous thief taker he was met by the densest ignorance.

"Phenix? No, they had never heard of such a man," but the mention of the name of Bel Amein acted as a charm, and indifference changed into active interest.

Did Bel Amein direct the gentleman to the Romany tents in search of the great New York bloodhound? was asked; and being assured that he had come direct from the Arab girl, through the agency of the man with the white hair and the flowing beard, the Gipsies admitted that there was a stranger—a house-dweller—finding shelter within their tents and that it was, perhaps, the person whom he desired to see.

One of the tribe, an aged, hag-like woman, suggested that the stranger had better be conducted before the queen first, that her pleasure might be learned in the matter—Cynthia, Queen of Little Egypt, the ruler of the tribe as the wanderers explained to Rutger, but one of the Gipsy men, a muscular fellow with a huge black beard, overruled this.

"If the gentleman comes from Bel Amein it is enough," he said; and so Rutger was conducted to a good-sized tent in the middle of the encampment. This Rutger entered, to meet there a man of powerful physique, who was extended upon a couch formed of skins and blankets reading one of the New York morning papers.

He eyed the young man sharply as he entered, evidently surprised to see him.

Rutger, first ascertaining that the man before him was Joe Phenix, the famous police spy, proceeded at once with his story, to which the detective listened attentively.

"The Arab dancing-fortune-telling girl sent you to me?" he asked, when the young man paused in his recital.

"She did."

"And yet I never saw or even heard of her, for I have little leisure for amusements and seldom attend the opera," but the solution of this mystery soon came to the acute detective.

From the Arab dancing-girl to the dark-skinned children of the Romany race was but a step, and it was probable that a secret understanding existed between the two. But, why did the girl trouble herself about the young man's affairs at all, and why did she seek to have him enlisted in the chase? Was it because he was so hot on the track of the fugitive who had found shelter in the Gipsy camp? Was it to divert him from that chase that another was suggested to him? It looked like it. If the Arab beauty was interested in the Gipsies, as it would seem, it was more than probable that she was also interested in the fate of the rascal who, thanks to his Gipsy brothers, had contrived so cleverly to escape from the bloodhound's gripe.

It was upon Phenix's tongue to refuse to have anything to do with the young man's business, for all through his professional life his motto had been—one thing at a time; but there was something in the affair which naturally and irresistibly interested him; some secret prompter within urged him to undertake it; and, although generally the last man in the world to yield to impulse, yet on this occasion, almost before he knew what he was doing, he told young Van Tromp that he would undertake the case.

Carefully then, and as clearly as he could, Rutger told the story which the fortune-teller had revealed to him, while Phenix listened with the closest attention, and when the young man described how wonderfully skillful the tricks of the Arab girl had been performed, and how perplexed he had been, the detective laughed. This was a case to suit him; to unravel this marvel and detect how the seeming miracles were worked would be a pleasure; but, in regard to the knowledge which she possessed of old Rutger Van Tromp's affairs, the detective reasoned sagely enough.

"No stars—no mighty conjurations aided her in this matter!" he declared, speaking in a whisper, though, so that no watching ear without should gather in a single word. "If she speaks the truth—if the whole thing is not a lie, without the slightest foundation, she must have been well acquainted with the affairs of the man you speak of as your father's trusted servant, this Ishmael Tadcaster. It is a strange, odd name," he added. "Ishmael! I am not much versed in languages, nor in the science of names, but since I have been a sojourner in this Gipsy camp I have heard that name spoken. One of the men here is called Ishmael, so it is evident that it is a name common to the Gipsies. Tadcaster may have been a Gipsy. I have heard of cases where these Romany men, as they call themselves, have left their tribe and mingled with the world's people. Mace, the pugilist, was a Gipsy, and I have heard that some pretty prominent men in New York—bankers, brokers, merchants and lawyers—were sons of this wild and wandering race. So the first step in the game is to find out who and what Ishmael Tadcaster was; the next, to discover what relations existed between him and this Arab girl; another important point, too—does your half-brother, Elbert, know aught of this second will, and if so, has he or will he take any measures in regard to it? To-morrow I shall be at liberty to attend to it."

And with this assurance Rutger Van Tromp was dismissed.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO PROPHETS.

ELBERT VAN TROMP sprang to his feet, eager to be sure that he was no longer a prisoner. The girl never stirred, but regarded him with dreamy, indifferent eyes.

"Nicely played!" he exclaimed—"very nicely played, indeed, and I must confess that you are far more skillful than I imagined; but now, if you please, will you explain the meaning of this little comedy? Why did you entrap me, and why, having entrapped me, did you release me? Was it just to show me that I was completely in your power, and that if you chose you could do exactly as you liked with me?"

"I do not understand you," the girl replied, her tone cold and distant. "You demanded an audience at an unseemly hour, and when refused became insolent; then, as the easiest way of getting rid of you, I gave orders to admit you. You were conducted to the reception-room, while I prepared to receive you. When you were summoned, you were found to be asleep and it seemed impossible to wake you. I ordered you to be brought hither, thinking that, in the purer air of this apartment, the slumber which hung so heavily upon you might be banished."

As the girl spoke a sudden thought occurred to the young man, and with a rapid movement he thrust his hand inside of his coat, where, in an inner pocket he carried a memorandum-book, in which were folded important papers, while on its pages were memoranda of great importance to him.

His thought was that, while he slept the book might have been taken from him; but it was there, safe enough, and with his fingers he could feel the important documents folded within it.

"Well, it was a cunningly played trick, whatever the reason for it, and I will own frankly that, so far, you have been more than a match for me. But now, come! I am anxious to learn what the future has in store for me if your art can tell so much."

"Draw near and give me your hand," commanded the girl, with the air of a queen.

The man obeyed, and the Arab prophetess bending her head examined the lines in the palm of the hand closely, while he, fixing his bold, bright eyes upon her lovely face, eagerly surveyed the beauty which it exhibited.

"Your life, so far, has been an easy and tranquil one," she said. "Fortune has constantly befriended you, and you have had no reason to complain."

"The past I know, and many others know it, also," he observed, a touch of contempt in his voice; "the future is what I am anxious about. Let me know what the future holds for me."

"It is all dark," she replied, impressively.

"All dark?"

"Yes, danger and bloodshed obscure the lines of your life. If I am not wrong you are about to engage in an enterprise which is doomed to certain and utter failure."

Despite his self-control the man was startled, and he gazed at the seeress with an anxious face.

"Not a very pleasant prospect, truly," he remarked; "but, are you sure about this matter? Is it not possible that you may have made some mistake?"

"No; no science can be more exact; there is naught but trouble and danger for you in the future."

"And isn't there any way by which it can be avoided? or perhaps your art is not potent enough to answer the question."

"Intermingled with the line of your life is another, and that other is destined to exert a great influence over you—an influence always exerted for evil and never for good. Of course it is not possible for me or for any one else, no matter how well versed in the art of palmistry, to read in the lines of your hand the past or the future of another. I can only tell you that this man—it is a man, I can easily detect that by the strength and depth of the line—is destined to be your evil genius unless you tear yourself aloof from him. Beware of his advice—beware of his aid! Both alike will be fatal to you."

The visitor was deeply puzzled. Was there something then, after all, in this science of palmistry? A short half-hour ago he would have derided the idea, but the girl had, in a measure, hit upon the exact truth. He was engaged in a dark and desperate scheme, and to that scheme he had been prompted by an ally whose past life he had every reason to suppose would not bear a very close investigation. But, was the rest of the warning true? If he persisted in his design would ruin, disaster and death follow?

Again he put the question which he had previously asked.

"Is there any way by which this danger can be avoided?"

"Yes; a prompt abandonment of the scheme which this man has proposed to you; do justice to all with whom you may come in contact and so you will prosper."

"Well, with this statement have you exhausted the resources of your art? Can you not in the lines of my hand read more of the future?"

"No; it is not possible; fate does not deign that the life of a human shall be read as we read the pages of an open book."

"And the stars—you are a star-reader, are you not? Can you not gain some knowledge from them?"

"Yes, I can draw your horoscope, but that will take time, and I must know the exact hour and minute of your birth so as to ascertain which planet rules in your house of life."

"I am afraid that will not be possible; all the witnesses who were present at my birth died, long ago, and though I can come pretty near the hour, possibly, by looking over some of my father's old papers, yet the exact minute I do not believe can be ascertained. But, is palmistry and the reading of the stars the only branches of the black art that you practice? Have I not heard something of a magic basin filled with water, crystal clear, upon whose surface, by conjurations, you cause scenes of the future to appear?" The man spoke in a jesting tone, but it was evident that he was deeply interested.

"Not scenes—faces only."

"And is this the basin?"

"It is."

"I challenge then a proof, for I doubt your ability to accomplish this feat, although I am free to confess that you are far more accomplished than I would have believed it possible for any one to be. Show me the face of this man whom you say fate declares is destined to be my evil genius."

"And if I show you the face will you believe that there is something in my art—will you heed my warning, and desist from the purpose which can only bring evil to you?" the girl demanded, fixing her large, beautiful dark eyes, so lustrous in their light, full upon his face.

"And why do you take such an interest in the matter? What is it to you—what care you for my fate?"

"Are you not a human being? Are we not all the children of one common stock? Because fate has gifted me with the power to read the future, is it any reason why I should not feel sad when I am forced to predict evil to a fellow-creature?"

"And by turning aside, a danger may be averted?" the man asked.

"Is not history full of such instances? How many great men in the olden time, by consulting the wise men, and being governed by their counsel, escaped disaster, and how many, rushing heedlessly on, like Caesar, dashed madly to sure destruction?"

"Show me the face, and then I may be able to believe that there is something more than a clever trick in all this."

"Unbeliever, you shall be satisfied." The girl waved her hand as she spoke, and the light instantly commenced to grow dim; while the crystal-clear water changed, suddenly, and became as black as ink.

The man looked in astonishment at this transformation, and, acute as he believed himself, he was not able to detect how the trick was performed.

The room now being in utter darkness, with only light from the stars above visible, the water in the mystic basin began gradually to get luminous, and soon the indistinct outlines of a human face could be seen.

With great interest the man watched the phantom-like appearance. Clearer and clearer grew the outlines until at last the hands, the face of the adventurer, Reginald Tadcaster, could clearly be distinguished.

Despite the command which he had over himself, Elbert Van Tromp uttered a cry of amazement, and at the sound, as though the tones of a human voice had power to break the spell, the face mirrored upon the surface of the water vanished and the water became black as ink again. The room, too, being in almost utter darkness, Elbert was seized with a sudden apprehension that the girl would take advantage of the gloom to disappear.

"Stay, one moment!" he exclaimed.

"What do you wish?" and her voice sounded from the further end of the apartment.

"You have told my fortune, now let me tell yours!"

"Are you, then, a prophet?"

"Prophet enough to reveal to you that a rich future is in store for you."

"I am afraid your predictions will not be true."

"That depends upon yourself alone. You can make it all true, if you like."

"Speak; I will listen."

"You are loved by a man who is wealthy enough to give you everything that your heart can desire; the future will be bright and beautiful if you accept; no more toil, no more care, but a position which will excite the envy of all your associates."

"And what am I to pay for this?" and there was ringing scorn in the voice as she put the question. "Such a happy future is not to be bought without a price."

"Pay! nothing at all, except to give yourself to the man who loves you."

"But I do not love, and the woman who gives herself to a man whom she does not love pays a terrible price, and no matter what she buys she is the loser by the bargain."

The voice was growing fainter and fainter, and it was easy to guess that the young prophetess was retreating from the room.

"Will you not stay a moment and listen to me?" Van Tromp asked, imploringly.

"It is useless; you are but wasting time."

"A bright future is in store for you if you will only be reasonable."

"You are not a prophet and cannot foretell the future, but the warning which I have given you is truth itself. Heed the warning and you may avert an evil destiny; neglect it, and in the hour of your despair you will curse the evil star which sat in your house of life when you determined upon such a course. Farewell! and come not here again. To-night we have met through the agency of our own acts, but never again will we stand face to face until a cold and cruel fate wills that we must come together."

"A moment, please!" and with the exclamation Van Tromp started forward, but not three steps had he taken when the very floor beneath his feet gave way; at the same moment a firm hand was laid upon his shoulder and the voice of the old man sounded in his ears:

"Be not alarmed; no harm menaces you; stand firm and fear not."

Van Tromp obeyed the injunction. Down—down he went—all utter darkness; but for a moment or two only; then came a great flood of light, and to his astonishment the young man found that he was standing in the main entry-way facing the front door, but not the slightest sign was visible of the mechanism by means of which this astonishing performance had been accomplished.

Quick-witted and clever as was the young

New Yorker he could but acknowledge that, so far, he had not proved himself a match for the Arab beauty.

"How much am I to pay?" he asked, haughtily, addressing the old man.

"What you like—or nothing at all, if it so pleases you."

"I do not care to be your debtor!" Van Tromp returned, angrily. "Here is a twenty-dollar gold piece—will that suffice?"

With a simple bow the old man received the coin, and the visitor hurried from the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN COUNCIL.

ELBERT VAN TROMP had left the house of the fortune-teller about as puzzled as any man could well be, and the more he reflected upon the strange affair, the greater became his bewilderment. He was annoyed, too; this Arab girl, common stage-dancer though she was, he was convinced was not for him—that he had very little chance of winning the heavy amount which he had so recklessly wagered. Young Livingston was sure to capture the five thousand dollars; and dark and gloomy was the expression which came over his face.

There were men enough in New York who could be hired to do almost anything for money; could not the girl be carried off and forcibly placed in his power? It was worth studying up; indeed it seemed not a difficult thing to accomplish. And as he walked up-town toward his mansion, in his mind arose the image of Reginald Tadcaster.

Tadcaster was the very fellow to serve his now settled purpose. Daring, unscrupulous, and clever-witted, if there was a man who could devise means whereby the rash wager could be won, it was Tadcaster.

But, Tadcaster it was whose image the Arab girl had caused to appear on the surface of the water in the magic basin, and against him her warnings had been directed. He was the evil genius doomed to bring misfortune in his train!

Now that he was free from the spell which the strange house, and its still stranger inmate, had cast upon him, he laughed to scorn these predictions of evil.

"The stars with their auguries may have been potent enough to turn the old-time 'sharps' from their designs, but I will be hanged if all the fortune-tellers in the world can make me swerve a single inch from the course I have marked out for myself. It would be a rare joke on the stars, too, not only to despise their warning but to carry off their high-priestess."

The idea amused Elbert greatly, and by the time he reached his dwelling he had determined upon the reckless scheme which appeared to him neither impossible nor very hazardous.

By the aid of the telephone, that modern miracle, he summoned Tadcaster to his side.

Although the hour was late the message found the man, for Tadcaster was a great deal of a night-bird by nature. Since his first appearance in our story, Tadcaster had changed materially. He was then, if the reader will remember, rather shabbily dressed, and altogether appeared very much like an adventurer who lived by his wits, but, during the brief time which has elapsed since then, he had completely changed his personal appearance, and so cleverly had the transformation been effected, that Van Tromp, although warned by Tadcaster that he was about to get into a "new skin," as the other expressed it, failed to recognize him when the change was made.

The adventurer had assumed the disguise of an English tourist, and, to the life, he was the traveling Briton, yellow hair, mutton-chop whiskers, plaid tweed suit, eye-glass and all.

Alfred Veriance, of Wolverhampton, England, he pretended to be, and that most acute of all observers, the clerk of the stately hostelry where the supposed Englishman put up, was completely deceived, and would willingly have taken his oath that the disguised man was what he pretended to be.

Tadcaster answered at once when summoned, and in Van Tromp's sanctum, the smoking-room of the house, with some choice cigars and a bottle of good wine, the two proceeded to discuss the subject.

Elbert explained matters frankly to his companion; he told him of the wager which he had so foolishly made, although his companion was already aware of it, for he had overheard the conversation, as we have recorded, and had predicted that the better would lose, but when Van Tromp went on to tell of the peculiar experience which he had had in the house of the fortune-teller; how he had been fastened in the chair and the powerful drugs had rendered him insensible, then Tadcaster became so interested that the cigar held between his white, animal-like teeth went out for want of attention; almost breathlessly he lunged upon the words of the young New Yorker, and Van Tromp, noticing how strongly and strangely he was affected, was puzzled to account for it, for he knew of no reason why Tadcaster should be so powerfully interested.

When he had finished there was a dead silence for a few moments, for Tadcaster was

staring vacantly at the wall, his thoughts seemingly far away.

The silence continued, and Van Tromp was just about to break it when Tadcaster abruptly spoke.

"All this means mischief!" he cried, a dark and threatening look upon his face, and to Van Tromp's ears Tadcaster's voice sounded hoarse and unnatural. "Why did you go to this house? What foolhardy thought prompted you to place yourself in the hands of your enemies? While you were in the stupor they searched you. Have you any important papers upon your person?"

"No, nothing more than a few memorandums."

"About what—not of the matter in which we are both interested, I hope?"

"Well, yes; I believe there is a memorandum or two relative to it in my book," Elbert admitted.

Tadcaster made a gesture of annoyance.

"But, what does it matter anyway?" Van Tromp asked, feeling that he had acted imprudently in the affair.

"What does it matter? Why, can you not see that you have put a possible foe in possession of the information that is known only to myself and one other person, yourself of course excepted?"

"But, what reason has this girl to trouble herself about the matter at all—what is it to her?"

"How can I answer that question? how is it possible for me to tell? but the proof is plain; she does take an interest in it, else why should she speak about it at all? Why does she warn you that I am destined to be your evil genius, and that naught but disaster can come from the projects in which you are engaged? It was all a trick of course, a clever trick, and the woman who can devise such a trick is not to be trifled with; we must be careful or she will make us feel her power."

"I was near running my head into the lion's mouth, then," Van Tromp confessed, "for I was thinking about carrying the girl off and making her mine by force, since there isn't the slightest chance of winning her by fair means."

"It is the very plan!" cried Tadcaster, with a dark and lowering face. "Desperate diseases demand desperate remedies. This girl must be got out of the way or she will spoil all our plans. But, it will cost a deal of money, because bold and desperate men who will not stop at anything must be enlisted."

"Draw on me for what is necessary, and I will honor the draft!"

"You are wise, for if this girl is not got out of the way the chances are that all our schemes will come to naught. The risk is great, but, since she has chosen to threaten both you and myself, why then if it is to be war let us make it—short, sharp and decisive."

The angry vehemence displayed by the steward's son puzzled the New Yorker, for as a general rule the adventurer was as cool as an iceberg.

"You are strangely interested in this matter," Van Tromp observed.

"I have good reason to be; have I not everything at stake?"

"Everything? How so?"

The other laughed—the peculiar, cunning laugh which he so much affected.

"Is not money everything in this world? If you succeed in retaining this vast sum, the possession of which is now threatened, will I not share in the spoil?"

The reasoning was good, and Van Tromp affected to be satisfied, but in reality he was not, for he was sure that the other was concealing something from him.

CHAPTER XV.

AN ODD VISITOR.

At this point the conference between the two was interrupted by a discreet tap on the door, and in obedience to Elbert's command a servant made his appearance who bore a message that an old man desired speech with the master of the mansion upon important business, and the servant further added—perceiving, as he explained, that the man was rather poorly dressed, and was not at all the kind of visitor Mr. Van Tromp would care about seeing—that he had attempted to get rid of the fellow, but he had persisted, saying that his business was very important and that he was an old friend of Mr. Ishmael Tadcaster, and his business concerned that gentleman.

The two young men exchanged glances; the information was a puzzle to both of them, but the same thought was in their minds: the man had better be seen and his business ascertained.

"Show him in, and keep your eyes on the overcoats and other portable property in the hall," Van Tromp commanded.

The servant grinned; a like apprehension had come into his own mind, and he proceeded to explain that he had deputed one of the other servants to keep watch of the visitor.

Then the man withdrew, and Tadcaster spoke at once:

"The mystery thickens; either this is some

novel begging expedient, or else of some importance, for the fellow, if he has a grain of sense, would surely never risk being kicked out by coming here at such an hour, unless his business was of some importance."

"But will he be apt to speak in your presence?"

"Of course not, if he has anything of any importance to say; but, for all that, I must hear the conversation, for I was pretty well acquainted with all my father's business, and few men were there with whom he had any business dealings whom I did not know."

Van Tromp rose from his seat, went to one of the book cases which adorned the walls of the apartment, touched a secret spring and the case swung out like a door into the room, disclosing a small closet behind it.

"This was one of my father's hobbies in the old time when safe-making had not reached its present perfection. When he built this house he devised this secret closet to hold his valuables. Take a chair in there, and as there isn't anything between you and this room but the thin partition which forms the back of the book-case, you can hear every word spoken."

"It would be better if I could see the fellow," the other observed; "perhaps I might be able to recognize him."

"You can see him," and then Van Tromp showed the other where the thin board which formed the back of the book-case had warped under the influence of the heat of the well-warmed room, leaving a crack through which any one in the dark closet could command a view of all that took place in the apartment.

"Splendid! As well-planned a hiding-place as the wit of man could devise!" Tadcaster averred; "not a bad place for a man to secrete himself if he happened by chance to do anything to bring the officers of the law down on him. The keenest-nosed human bloodhound would not be apt to scent out such a retreat as this."

"Well, if you ever get into any such difficulty, this snugger is at your service."

"All right; I won't forget the offer."

Both men spoke jestingly, and yet each one suspected that the time might come when the jest would become earnest.

Tadcaster took a chair and entered the closet. Van Tromp swung back the book-case, and it would have taken more than human ingenuity to have discovered the secret hiding-place from outward appearances.

Van Tromp then resumed his seat in the arm-chair by the table in the center of the room, and hardly was he seated when the servant conducted the visitor into the room.

When the owner of the mansion surveyed the stranger he did not wonder at the suspicions of the butler, who had taken it upon himself to ascertain the business of the caller.

The man evidently was "a character." In person he was about the medium height, apparently, but he was so bent with age and toil that he appeared quite undersized in stature, although as muscular almost in form as a giant. His face was a peculiar one, the skin being as yellow as parchment; the chin was covered with a heavy gray-black beard, which was as kinky as the wool of an African; the hair of his head resembled the beard, both in color and character, although worn quite long; and from under his bushy eyebrows looked eyes, ferret-like in their sharpness. A close observer, and one well versed with the nations of the earth, would have set the man down an Israelite.

His dress suited well with his face; a very long coat, half "ulster" and half body-coat, rather the worse for wear, covered him from neck to heels. His long, muscular-looking hands were incased in dingy brown gloves, which, somehow, gave one an idea of the talons of some fierce and rapacious bird of prey. Under his arm he carried a huge umbrella which evidently had seen much service.

The servant introduced the caller into the room, then discreetly retired. Van Tromp, who rather prided himself on his judgment, took a good look at the man and in his own mind in the glance summed him up:

No beggar—no adventurer, but a crafty, wily man of business, who came upon serious matters intent, and who would not have come unless his business was important.

And while Van Tromp had been attentively observing the stranger, he, on his part, had busied himself with a minute scrutiny of the apartment. It was evident he was a careful and cautious man.

"Well, sir, you wished to see me?" the master of the house remarked.

"You ish Mister Van Tromp?" the man asked, with the strong German Jew accent.

"Yes, sir; that is my name."

"And mine is Solomons—Moses Solomons. I have an office in Wall street; I am a broker and also do a leetle business in bill-discounting; anything, you know, to make de honest penny," and the old fellow chuckled and rubbed his hands.

Van Tromp had never met one of this fraternity before yet had often heard of them.

As the jackals wait upon the lions, the vultures upon the battlefields, the camp bummers on the march of the victorious army, so upon

the outskirts of business hang a gang of disreputable wretches eager for prey and plunder.

"I know very little about Wall street, or the men that do business there; in fact, I do not care to know, as I believe that it generally costs a man a deal of money to get well acquainted in that locality."

"He, he!" chuckled the old fellow, seeming to enjoy a joke; "for a young man you are very wise, sir, indeed. Many men of twice your years pay much monish before they are as wise. Well, Mister Van Tromp, to come at once to business, I have a leetle speculation to propose to you."

"I never speculate, sir."

"Wait, mine goot friend, wait until you hear what it is and then perhaps we can make a trade."

"There isn't the slightest chance, sir, for you to inveigle me into any kind of a speculation whatever, and if this is the business upon which you have come, all that I have to say is you are wasting not only your own time but mine also, and I will ring for the servant to show you out."

But as Van Tromp extended his hand toward the bell which was in the center of the table, the old man hastened to stop him.

"No, no, my tear, don't be hasty! Listen to me first. I will not detain you a minute, but in the first place, are we alone?" and as he put the question the old man cast a searching and a suspicious glance around him.

"Certainly, you can see for yourself in regard to that."

The visitor seemed satisfied with the assurance, and yet apparently so doubtful was he, that, after he completed his inspection of the room, even peering under the table, he glanced in a very suspicious way at the door, then he nodded his head toward it.

"Walls have ears sometimes," he remarked, in a half-whisper, "your servants—they would not listen at the door, eh?"

"It would not be well for any one of them if I caught a man at it," Van Tromp replied, haughtily.

"May I satisfy mineself?" asked the broker, persuasively. "I am an old man; in mine life two or three times have I been caught in traps and much money has it cost me to get out. I am not rich and I cannot afford to lose."

"Satisfy yourself, by all means!" Van Tromp began to get impatient. He had about come to the conclusion that the old fellow was a humbug and that the quicker he got rid of him the better.

The visitor glided to the door and opened it quickly; if any one had been listening they most surely would have been caught, but the entryway was deserted.

Perfectly satisfied, now, that there was no danger of eavesdropping, the broker closed the door very carefully and returned to the chair by the table, into which the master of the mansion had motioned him upon his first entrance.

"Now for business, my tear Mr. Van Tromp," and the old man became very mysterious indeed. "Many years ago I was very well acquainted with a gentleman who was your father's confidential man of business, Mister Ishmael Tadcaster."

"That is perfectly correct, sir; that gentleman in his lifetime did have charge of my father's affairs."

"He and I were great friends—he do much business with me. I invest money for him many, many times. He was a very honest man—a very upright, honest man. I cry like a child when I hear of my old friend's death."

"No doubt, but what has this all to do with me?" Van Tromp asked impatiently.

"Wait, I am coming to it; I am slow I know; it is the privilege of age. I am not so young as I once was. Well, with Mister Ishmael Tadcaster I do much business. I was in his confidence; he trust me much—he trust me with some things that he not trust any one else with in this world—secrets—secrets of his own, secrets concerning other people—your father, for instance," and as he finished he darted a cunning glance from under his heavy eyebrows at the face of the young man. Van Tromp bore the scrutiny well and replied in the most placid manner possible:

"What you say is quite probable; few men are without secrets of some kind."

"I come to you to talk business, and we will not beat about the bush!" the old man went on, with an appearance of great frankness. "We are not children—we are men of business, and it will not take us long to come to an understanding. Your father had two sons, you are the younger of the two, and yet you inherited your father's property while your half brother, Rutger, received barely a living; how comes it that this is so?"

A blow was coming, yet Elbert kept his face well.

"If you are at all acquainted with my father's affairs you must be aware that by the terms of his will I inherited the property to the exclusion of my brother."

"Ah, yes—ah, yes, I remember; that was the first will your father executed, years ago, but,

how about the second will, made just before his death, in which he divided the property equally between you and your half-brother?" and the old man leered at the other as he put the question.

Van Tromp met the assault bravely.

"Your knowledge apparently exceeds my own, for one will is all that I know anything about."

"But if another will is in existence, giving half to you only, and the other half to your brother?"

"It would be a very lucky thing for him and correspondingly unlucky for me," Van Tromp answered, seemingly not at all ruffled.

"Such a will exists!"

"Where?"

The blunt question rather bothered the old fellow for a moment.

"Ah, well, that is a point about which much can be said."

"I do not comprehend what you are driving at; if the will is in existence where is it, and why is it that it has not been produced?"

"There are wheels within wheels in this world, but there is such a will; I know it exists, and though you play your part well yet I do suspect that you know or have heard something of this document before."

"Have you got it?"

Again the broker showed his teeth and grinned.

"S'pose I have, what then—you buy him, eh?"

"Oh, I did not say that."

"But you mean it; you are no fool; you would not throw away one-half of your fortune when you can retain it easily enough."

"Why do you come to me?" demanded Van Tromp, with a look full of suspicion. "If there is any such document in existence, could you not make a far better bargain with Rutger Van Tromp than with me?"

"Oh no," and the broker grinned hideously. "I am no greenhorn; I have seen much of the world, and from what little I know of the character of your brother and yourself I am satisfied that I can do better with you than with him. I am not a principal in this affair, you understand; I am merely acting for another party, but of course the larger the price the paper brings the larger my commission will be, and now to come directly to the point, do you wish to trade?"

"I cannot very well answer that question, for I have serious doubts in regard to the matter; I do not believe there is any such paper in existence."

"Suppose I prove to you there is?"

"Convince me and then I will talk with you."

"Aha!" chuckled the old fellow, "you are a very cautious gentleman. It is good; we cannot be too cautious. Well," and the broker rose to depart, "I will satisfy you; I will see my principal and tell the party what you say. Oh, it is all right; we will make a trade—I have not the least doubt. It may be a week before I can see you again, as it will take time to see the party for whom I am acting, but you may rest assured that no steps will be taken in the matter without consulting you. Here is my card, and if you should want to see me you can reach me at almost any time."

The Hebrew put a card into Van Tromp's hand, that gentleman rung the bell, and a servant appeared to show the stranger out.

Hardly had the door closed behind the broker when Tadcaster made his appearance, a strange expression upon his face.

"It is a 'plant,' Van Tromp!" he exclaimed; "this man is a fraud and he means mischief. Is there any way by which I can leave the house besides the front door?"

"Yes, by the back passage into the alley."

"Adieu then for the present. Before this night is over I will hunt this fellow to his lair. Show me the way, please!"

Tadcaster was on mischief bent.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SURPRISE.

THE servant accompanied the broker to the door and saw him safely on the outside of it; down the steps went the old man and then with his shambling gait he proceeded along the street, heading down-town, apparently not taking the slightest notice of the surroundings, yet, in reality, nothing escaped his watchful eyes. Particularly careful was he, too, to ascertain whether he was followed or not, for that a watch would be put upon him after leaving the house of Van Tromp he strongly suspected, but no suspicious signs did he see. The tracker who had taken upon himself the task of running him to earth was too old a hand at the business to be easily detected.

Tadcaster, turning the block, walked very rapidly down a side street for two or three blocks when he came out into the avenue ahead of him and walking slowly along so timed himself as to keep about half a block in the advance.

Fortune favored Tadcaster that night, for, the corner of the fourth street below, he encountered two men, busy in conversation, while a hack, which evidently belonged to them, was drawn up close to the curbstone.

"Hullo, boys, what's up?" asked Tadcaster, as he came up to them, and as he spoke he made a peculiar, rapid sign with the fingers of his right hand.

The men—a couple of well-dressed, but very muscular-looking fellows, with a rather suspicious look about them, despite of their good clothes—started at first, evidently alarmed at the salutation.

"Don't be afraid; it is I, boys, the chief," Tadcaster continued; "but, what is the matter?"

"The jig is up in regard to that job," one of the men answered; "the crib is alarmed, I am sure, for the lights are burning and they are always put out at ten, and there is a fellow loafing on the corner who is a private watchman, I am certain. I say that it is sheer madness to go on, but Johnny here is for risking it."

"No use; let it alone until some other time when they are off their guard; here is another job that must be attended to immediately."

By this time the old broker was close at hand.

"Doctor Vanderbroom?" exclaimed Tadcaster, raising his voice slightly and assuming a slight English accent to perfection; "no, sir, I do not know any gentleman by that name in this neighborhood, but I am not very well acquainted with this part of the city," and turning just then he pretended to catch sight of the broker who was just abreast of the party. "Perhaps this gentleman knows Doctor Vanderbroom?"

The old man halted, shook his head, and scanned the faces and figures of the two men. Clearly he thought they were worth looking at.

Tadcaster stepped aside as if to give the men a chance to speak; and then the moment the broker's attention was diverted from him, with a tiger-like spring he jumped forward and dealt the old man a terrible blow on the head with a short club which he had drawn from his coat pocket.

It was a terrific whack, and yet it made no sound, although the violence of the shock sent the old man reeling, stunned, into the arms of one of the strangers, who sprung forward to prevent him from falling.

The club was the professional tool so dear to the heart of the English "cracksman," the sand-club, a stout canvas bag, about a foot long and two inches wide, tightly filled with sand, a dangerous weapon with which a blow hard enough to kill can be given and yet hardly abrade the skin!

"Into the coach with him, quick, before we are surprised!" Tadcaster commanded, and, prompt to obey, the others thrust the senseless man into the hack.

The hour was late, the street deserted, with the exception of the little group by the carriage, and not a soul but those engaged in the affair had witnessed the outrage.

"Johnny, you get on the box; and, Ted, come inside with me," Tadcaster continued. "Get your gag ready, for if this is the man I think it is, he has a head as thick as an ox's skull and will soon recover from the clip. Off with you for Castle Dismal and take care we are not overhauled by the police on the way."

Ten minutes later the coach was on Broadway rolling northward.

CHAPTER XVII.

CASTLE DISMAL.

A short distance above the junction of Spuyten Duyvel creek and the Hudson river, a wooded point projects into the stream—a wild, dreary, rocky spot, although at one time it had been a place of great beauty, for the picturesque advantages which nature had bestowed upon it had been vastly improved by the cunning hand of art.

A gentleman of wealth and taste had bought the point, which comprised some five acres of ground, erected a large mansion in its center, and spent a great deal of money in improving the place. But a fatality seemed to hang over the wild, beautiful estate. The owner's wife quarreled with and fled from him, thus breaking up his home; terrible financial losses followed, until at last, when the sheriff came to take possession on behalf of the creditors, the wretched occupant committed suicide.

And from that day forth his spirit was said to haunt the scene of the tragedy. True or not, one thing was certain: no one, owner or tenant, was able to live in the house; whether it was malaria or ghosts, one and all quitted the spot after a very brief experience, until Tadcaster, in a boating excursion one day noticed the house from the river, and concluded that it would suit a certain purpose admirably; so he rented it for a mere trifle, compared with what such a place ought to have been worth. The place was very secluded, being reached by a private road, and not a neighbor was within sight.

To this lonely mansion, which Tadcaster had christened Castle Dismal, the old broker was conveyed. As the coach rolled along, in obedience to Tadcaster's commands, the man had been securely bound and gagged; blindfolded also, for the prime mover in this enterprise was not a man to neglect a single precaution.

The estate was completely surrounded by a high stone wall, which swept in a semicircle

from the river to the river again. A pair of large iron gates gave access to the grounds, which could also be reached by a boat from the river. By the carriage-entrance was a small porter's lodge. The gates were always shut, and a trusty man, who occupied the house, kept constant watch. Therefore, late as was the hour, Tadcaster and his party found no difficulty in gaining admission.

The carriage drove straight up to the mansion. The bound and helpless man was taken from the vehicle and conveyed to a cellar below the building, which apparently had been fitted up expressly for the reception of prisoners, for the door which led into it was of iron, with a strong lock upon it, together with two stout bolts, one at the top and the other at the bottom. All these fastenings were upon the outside of the door, showing that they were for the purpose of keeping any one from getting out rather than to prevent any one from getting in.

The walls of the cell, for a cell it was to all intents and purposes, were of solid stone, and there was not the slightest sign of a window, fresh air being conveyed into this dismal abode by means of a series of small holes drilled through one of the stones high up in the side of the wall. The cunning of a fiend had been employed in the construction of this dreadful dungeon, planned after the fashion of those terrible torture cells which existed in the dark ages, when a royal whim doomed unhappy victims to waste a life away in these living tombs.

Within the cell was a small, common table, a single stool, and a large bundle of straw heaped up in a corner, which evidently served for a bed.

The old man, still gagged, bound and blindfolded, was placed upon this bundle of straw, and then, in obedience to Tadcaster's command, the men withdrew, leaving him alone with his victim.

A lighted lantern upon the table illuminated the cell.

Tadcaster's first movement was a rather singular one; he took off his hat and placed it outside of the cell; then he drew from his pocket a sort of a hood, made of thin, black silk, and drew it on over his head clear to his neck—there were holes in it for eyes and mouth—thus completely disguising his identity.

This done, he approached the prisoner and removed the bandage which blinded, and the gag which silenced him.

The man had been placed in a sitting position, with his back against the wall, and was so securely bound, both hands and feet, that it was impossible for him to move.

"In the name of goodness, what ish de meaning of this?" exclaimed the broker, the moment he recovered the use of his speech, and he looked with anxious and astonished eyes around him as he spoke.

"Do not be alarmed; you are not in the slightest danger, sir, so long as you are obedient and do as you are bid," Tadcaster replied, assuming a gruff voice which completely disguised his real tones.

"Mine gootness!" and the Jewish accent came out very strong. "I vill do anyting you say, mine goot gentlemen, and I do beg of you from the bottom of mine heart that you will do me no harm."

"No danger if you fully realize that you are completely in my power."

"Oh, I know that—I am no fool. I know that, and I will do anyting—that ish anyting in reason; but I am not a rich man; I cannot afford to pay much, but what I can I vill give."

"Who asked you for money?" interrupted the other, roughly.

"I beg your pardon, goot sir; I beg your pardon ten thousand times!" the broker cried, in the humblest manner possible. "I did not know—I only thought—"

"That you had been kidnapped for the sake of getting a ransom out of you, eh?"

"Vell, I did not know—"

"How much, by the way, is your check good for?"

"For not'ing at all!" the old man cried, apparently greatly alarmed. "I am not a rich man; I am only a poor devil of a broker who has hard work to get along—hard work to make a decent living. I do not keep a bank account; I am not rich enough for that; but I have some goot friends who will help me, I am sure, if you will let me send a letter to them—"

"Aha! you want a chance to warn the police!" cried Tadcaster, abruptly.

"Police! so help me gracious! I never trouble the police; oh, no; no police for me! I know enough about them."

"Who are you, anyway?"

"Oh, I am well known; I am no stranger in New York, and all the men with whom I do business in Wall street and elsewhere will tell you that I am a very honest man."

"Perhaps there is some mistake in this matter; maybe you are not the man who is wanted."

"Oh, I feel sure that there is some mistake!" cried the old fellow, grasping eagerly at the chance. "No one wants me. I am such an honest man that I have not a foe in the world. Oh, it is the truth. I would not tell you a lie for a thousand dollars."

"Two thousand might fetch you though, eh?" and the questioner laughed in a manner that was not at all calculated to reassure the broker.

"No, not for two thousand, except strictly in the way of business. A man cannot always tell the truth in business, you know."

"A very wise conclusion, indeed. You are a broker, you say?"

"Yesh, sir."

"And your name is?"

"Moses Solomons, sir—Moses Solomons."

"A Hebrew, I should judge?"

"You are right, sir; I am not ashamed of my race."

"And you are an honest man?"

"So the world says, sir."

"And being an honest man of business will you kindly explain to me what is the meaning of this?" And as he spoke Tadcaster approached the helpless man and with a single movement threw off the false wig and beard which the prisoner wore.

Not a word did the disguised man say but he simply gazed unmoved at the other.

The removal of the wig and beard wrought a wondrous change. The Hebrew look had been produced entirely by these articles and now that they were gone not in the least like a Jew did the man look.

With eyes as keen as a hawk's Tadcaster gazed upon the face stripped of its disguise, but he did not recognize him although he had a suspicion as to who and what he was, but this was not strange, for, if the prisoner was the person whom he suspected him to be, this was the first time he had ever encountered him.

"Queer things these for an honest broker to wear, Jew or Christian," Tadcaster remarked, pointing to the wig and beard.

"We all masquerade more or less in this life," the other retorted.

"You are not a Jew?"

"No."

"Nor a broker, either?"

"You are quite right."

"And now, will you have the kindness to explain to me the reason for this disguise?"

"Why should I? It isn't any of your business!" the prisoner exclaimed, bluntly, "and why should I put myself in your power any more than I am?"

"I don't understand how you could do that, very well," Tadcaster answered. "If I understand anything about the position of affairs, you are about as helpless as it is possible for you to be."

"Oh, no; I am not that; and I reckon you will find I am a sort of a white elephant on your hands before you get through with me. I don't know who or what you are, but of one thing I feel sure—that you can't have any business with me, and your men were barking up the wrong tree when you laid hold of me. You can't possibly make anything by keeping me here, for I was deceiving you when I said that I had friends who would be willing to advance money to get me out."

"Oh, you intended to trick me, then? You are not Joe Phenix, the detective?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER MYSTERY.

THE prisoner laughed.

"Joe Phenix, eh? Well, do I look like him?"

"That I am not capable of deciding, for I have not the pleasure of Mr. Phenix's acquaintance."

"Take my advice and don't make it—that is, if you are not 'on the square,' but are 'working the cross.'"

"You deny that you are Phenix?"

"If you knew the man there wouldn't be any necessity of denying it."

"Your capture was a mistake, anyway; I was after another man, but when I got you and discovered that you were wearing a false wig and beard, the idea came into my head that, by accident, we had stumbled upon a police spy, so cleverly were you disguised, and of course the inference was natural that you were Phenix. If you are Phenix, as I strongly suspect, despite your denial, you will never leave this place alive."

"Oh! That is the doom, is it?" the man retorted. "Now, if I were the detective, I should know you are some man whom Phenix has hunted so closely that, desperate, you are willing to encounter any risk to throw the human bloodhound off the track."

Tadcaster glared for a moment at the bold speaker; the hardihood of the man amazed and annoyed him.

"It is the old story of the fugitive, who, unable to throw the dog off the scent, turns at last and seeks to slay the beast. Vain attempt! If I am Phenix, look well to yourself, for you will be a lucky man indeed if five or six of my men are not close at your heels now!"

"You are playing a bluff game, but it will not win this time," Tadcaster answered, grimly.

"Whether Phenix, or meaner game, no one will be able to trace you here, and here you will remain until the game in which I am now engaged is played out. Your life may be spared, but, if it is, it will be because, confined here, you are helpless for either good or evil, and

when you find escape impossible, you may be willing to buy your freedom. You will be unbound and given the freedom of this apartment; there's a hole in the door through which your food and drink will be put, and when you weaken all you will have to do is to hammer on the door, and you will be attended to."

"How much money do you require? What is the price?"

"I don't want money, but your influence; I may be in a tight place some time and want to get out of it; if you are Joe Phenix, undoubtedly you could help me."

"And if I am Joe Phenix, undoubtedly I wouldn't do anything of the kind, even to save a life!"

"A week or a month in this place may cause you to change your mind."

"Time will tell in regard to that."

"Very true, and now before leaving you I must take the liberty of going through your pockets; possibly I may be able to find evidence there which will decide whether you are Joe Phenix or not."

"Go ahead; the game is entirely in your hands at present, sir."

"You are a deuced cool hand whether you are Phenix or some other rascal!" Tadcaster had to confess.

The inspection of the pockets revealed only a medium-sized revolver, loaded and all ready for action, a blank memorandum-book, its pages yet unstained by any entry, a small pocket-book with some thirty dollars in bills and a little slip of paper upon which was written a name.

"Reginald Tadcaster," said the disguised man, reading aloud the name, and casting a searching glance at the prisoner. He had walked to the table, to examine the paper by the lantern's light. "Is that another one of your aliases?"

"Oh, no; he is a man I have been instructed to find; he is mixed up in some will business, and certain parties have offered me a good big sum of money to hunt him up."

"And have you succeeded in finding this Tadcaster?" the other asked.

"Not yet; and no one seems to have the slightest knowledge of his whereabouts."

Tadcaster was perplexed. The existence of the will, so long hidden from the light, it was evident was more than suspected, yet he had not believed a single soul in the world besides himself had the slightest knowledge of the matter. That the will had been intrusted, by his father, to some one, or else hidden away in some secure place and the secret of the hiding-place given to some person in whom the old man trusted, he felt pretty sure, and that person, he believed, was the Gypsy girl, Cynthia, Queen of Little Egypt, but that the old man had confided the full particulars in regard to the important document to a living soul he could not bring himself to believe, but now there was no longer room for doubt; the secret of the will was known.

To cross-question the man in regard to his visit to Van Tromp, would be to lay himself open to discovery, if by any freak of fortune the prisoner should succeed in escaping. The prisoner free, knowledge of his existence might be reached, and Tadcaster just now had entirely too much at stake to run such a risk.

"If there is any money in this let me in for a share in it," he said; "I will deal fairly with you."

"You are welcome to all that I know about it, and I have told you about all I know now. There's a man somewhere called Regina d Tadcaster, and he knows something about a will which carries with it a heap of money."

"And who wants to find out about this matter?"

"A rich fellow up on the avenue; his name is Elbert Van Tromp."

Tadcaster saw that the man was deceiving him, for clearly Van Tromp could not have put the fellow on the scent.

"Well, I will look into the matter," he said; "and now I will bid you good-by; my men will be in to unbind you presently and I will leave the lantern here to scare the rats away."

Then the jailer departed.

Rapidly a plan of escape suggested itself to the prisoner; his eyes had fallen upon the stool; it was a good stout article and would answer admirably for a weapon.

"The chances are a hundred to one that there won't be more than four of them, and although they will be armed they will hardly think that one man will attempt to struggle against four. I'll get them to undo the cords around my legs first, and the moment my arms are free I will go for the stool and they will be better men than the average if I can't flax them, and if they use their weapons they are just as likely to damage each other as to wound me."

The bold plan seemed feasible enough, and the prisoner's heart gave a great leap when he heard the sound of footsteps without.

CHAPTER XIX.

LIFE FOR LIFE.

THE heavy iron door creaked upon its rusty hinges and two men entered the dungeon—two muscularly-built fellows, clad in dark clothes,

while over their heads they wore black silk hoods similar to that worn by their chief.

"Only two," muttered the prisoner to himself, "and no arms visible either! Well, if I can't lay them out I am not the man I think I am."

But, the master-mind who had planned this imprisonment was not ignorant of his captive's prowess—that is if the captive was the man he thought he was, and had taken all possible precautions.

One man kept watch at the door while the other advanced to the prisoner and untied his hands.

"There, old fellow, now you can undo your feet yourself," the man remarked, as he removed the strong cord from the wrists of the captive, then retreated to the door, through which both of the men passed to immediately close and lock it after them.

The prisoner was keenly disappointed, but, swallowing it as best he could, proceeded to remove the cord from his ankles.

"They will have to bring me something to eat," he muttered, "for they won't want to starve me to death yet awhile, I reckon; then I will get a chance at them."

But, against this contingency, also, the wit of the master had provided, for hardly were the words spoken when a panel in the upper part of the door was pushed aside and the black hood of one of the men appeared in the opening.

"When you get hungry in the morning, my friend, just rap pretty loudly on this little slide and you will be attended to," said the man. Then he reclosed the panel; with the shutting of the slide the hope of escape almost died in the heart of the captive. Through the panel his food was to pass, thus doing away with the necessity of any one entering the room.

But, if one method of escape was cut off another must be sought; so, when he had removed the cord from his ankles and stood up, in full possession of his limbs again, he commenced a careful survey of his dungeon, only to come to the conclusion that it would be almost impossible to force his way out.

The door was of iron and solid enough to withstand a battering-ram; and even if the prisoner had been provided with the tiny saws and miniature files peculiar to the burglar's kit, which he was not, it would have been a difficult task indeed for him to cut a way to freedom through that iron barrier.

"Stone walls and an iron door; tough obstacles indeed for a man without tools to encounter!" the captive thought, as he turned from the portal.

"He who enters here leaves hope behind!" said a low, sweet voice.

Quickly upon his heel turned the prisoner, greatly surprised despite his wonderful self-command.

In the center of the cell stood the Gypsy girl, Cynthia, Queen of Little Egypt!

"Hush! do not speak aloud!" she cautioned, "for even these stone walls may have ears."

The appearance of the girl really partook of the miraculous to the mind of the prisoner, although he was of that stern stuff which holds little belief in such things. Had she come through the solid wall? The door had not been opened. There was a secret passage, of course, somewhere in the walls, but, so skillfully had it been contrived that it was undiscoverable.

"Don't be alarmed in regard to that; I am not a bawler at any time," assured the man, in a low tone.

"There is but little danger, for, confident in the security of this place, there will be no watch put upon you, and you will not be disturbed until morning when your breakfast will be brought."

"You speak like one having full knowledge of all the plans of this gang of amiable cut-throats into whose hands I have fallen."

"I do know some of their plans, for there is one in the band who betrays his chief, although fully trusted by him, and this spy hastened at once to me with the news of your capture the moment he heard of it. He did not know who you were, but he guessed from the trouble his chief was taking that the capture was an important one, and thought I would like to know of it. I came at once and luckily was in time to overhear the last part of the conversation between you. He has a strong suspicion in regard to your identity, and it will not take him long to ascertain whether the suspicion is true or false, and if you are Joe Phenix you most certainly will not stir out of this place until the plans which he is carrying out are completed. You are a master of the art of transformation, and though you now apparently are stripped of all disguise, yet you have contrived to make a material change in your appearance from that which you presented on the night when you visited the Gypsy camp."

"Oh, then you think you have seen me before?" and a sly twinkle appeared in the eyes of the man.

"If I had not I should not be here now; you have contrived to baffle and confuse your captor in regard to your identity, but he is not as well acquainted with you as I am. You cannot deceive me. I know you are Phenix, and as

Phenix I would like to make a bargain with you."

"Egad, bargains pour in upon me to-night," observed Phenix, good-humoredly, for it was indeed the great detective who had been so cleverly entrapped.

"You fully realize your position, and if you are as shrewd and skillful as report gives out you must know your captor will soon be able to satisfy himself in regard to your identity, and when he is certain that you are Phenix what have you to expect?"

"Very little indeed, if I am Phenix." The detective was on his guard for the woman might be a spy and a tool of the man, for aught he knew.

"I can free you, and I will do so on one condition."

"Name it. I am in a capital mood just now for a trade."

"Do you understand that I am really giving you your life?"

"Isn't that putting it rather strong?"

"Are there not many men who have been consigned to a living tomb within the gloomy walls of a prison who would be glad of any chance to execute vengeance upon your head?"

"No doubt there are many who hanker to get square with Joe Phenix, and yet, somehow, when the chance comes they are not so eager to embrace it!" responded the detective, coolly.

"This man is no common rogue."

"It's Captain Molly, isn't it?" asked Phenix, abruptly.

The girl shook her head.

"I do not know him under that name," she replied, and the detective believed that she told the truth.

"I took it that it was that rogue, for more than any one I know of he has reason to wish me out of the way. I have been pretty hot on his trail lately, and I would have had him in the Gypsy camp if your brothers had not jumped upon me like a pack of wildcat."

"He has fled; did we not procure for him three days of grace?"

"Nonsense! He can no more keep away from New York, London or Paris than he can fly! Life to him would be worthless if he couldn't revel in the bustle of a big city. Paris and London are both too hot to hold him, and if I live I will make New York the same. But come; what is this bargain you have in your mind?"

"I ask of you a life for a life."

"I do not understand."

"Your life is in peril now."

"Yes, I presume it is."

"And if I aid you to escape it will be the same as if I gave you a life?"

"About the same."

"And if I do this and some of these days the fancy seizes me to ask a life of you, would you be willing to give it?"

"I do not comprehend your meaning; how could I give you a life?"

"A prisoner is in custody, the gallows, perhaps, with its death-dealing noose sways before him; I come to you and ask for the life of that man—"

"But I am not the Governor of the State, with the pardoning power vested in my hands."

"Ah! but you understand the secret and underhand ways by means of which the law can be cheated of its prey. Jailers can be bribed; tools to cut iron bars, false keys to open prison locks can be smuggled in to the captive."

"Very true! Well, I accept the offer, although I fear by doing so I am cheating myself, for you may ask for the victim I crave; but it is a bargain, all the same. You shall have a life for a life."

CHAPTER XX.

THE ESCAPE.

"I WILL trust to your honor to keep the promise, and now I will conduct you from this place; but first you must allow me to blindfold you," the Gypsy girl observed. "I rely upon you not to breathe to mortal soul the part which I have taken, for fate has so willed it that in this I must turn against those who believe me to be a friend. I am strangely situated. Two men are striving against each other, and I am bound, by powerful ties, to both; if I aid the one, of course I injure the other; never was a woman placed in a more cruel position."

Words earnestly, feelingly uttered, and that gave Phenix a significant clew, but he was too shrewd to betray this, for he surmised that, although now she was assisting him in his hour of peril, yet, if he was lucky enough to turn the tables and get the better of his late captor, most assuredly she would come to his aid. It was a sort of a game of see-saw, the girl in the middle of the plank of fate lent the weight of her assistance to that party at the time depressed.

"Oh, I freely pledge my word; I will never reveal that you have had any hand in my escape," Phenix said.

"I rely upon your promise," and taking the scarf from her neck, she bound it tightly around the head of the detective, completely blind-

folding him. "Now give me your hand, and follow."

Phenix did so, and, though deprived of sight, every other sense was on the alert; but, carefully as he observed, following in the footsteps of the girl, he could not tell when or where he passed from the cell into the passage. After he had proceeded about twenty steps he was walking along a narrow passage, for his elbows easily touched both sides of it.

"Tread carefully, for we are about to ascend a short flight of stairs," now cautioned the girl.

Phenix counted the steps—fourteen in all, and when they ended, he felt that he was treading upon wood. Clearly this secret passage ended in some building.

Three steps forward and the girl spoke again:

"Two steps down now; be careful!"

Two steps they descended; then the surface upon which they trod changed from wood to soil, and from the cool breeze which swept his cheek he guessed that he was in the open air.

On they went, the detective counting every step he took, but as the steps began to mount up into the hundreds he suddenly got the idea into his head that the girl was equal to the occasion—had surmised that he was counting the steps and was leading him about in a circle on purpose to perplex him, and although annoyed, yet he could not help admiring the quick wits which had in such a simple manner baffled him.

At last the girl stopped.

"You may remove the bandage now," she said.

Recovering the use of his eyes he saw that he was on the bank of a river, and from the vast reach of its waters he knew that he was viewing the Hudson.

"Step into the boat," ordered his guide, and Phenix noticed that a boat was drawn up on the shore.

The girl led the way and the detective followed, casting a rapid glance around him, if possible to fix the locality in his mind, but naught was visible save bushes and trees, a wild and desolate-looking place.

After he had entered the boat Phenix pushed it off; then the girl bent to the oars like a waterman and pulling for the center of the river, headed the craft down-stream.

All that could be discerned of either shore was a dark, mountain-like wall, and, keen of sight as was Phenix, he was utterly at fault in regard to the locality.

A half-hour later she landed him at an up-town pier.

"Remember your promise," she said, as she vanished in the gloom.

CHAPTER XXI.

CAPTAIN MOLLY.

THE detective and the superintendent of the New York police were closeted together on the morning following Phenix's release.

"Now, then, chief, I want all the information you can give me in regard to Captain Molly," was Phenix's demand.

"You had the official record?"

"Oh, yes," and producing a memorandum, the detective read from it.

"Captain Molly, *alias* Gipsy Joe, *alias* Robert Redmond, *alias* Professor Batswing, convicted and sentenced to Sing Sing for ten years for manslaughter. Right name unknown, but supposed to be Richard Redmond; Englishman by birth; presumed to be a Gipsy. Only a short time in the country. Escaped from prison one month after going there. Description, five feet seven inches in height, weighs one hundred and thirty-eight pounds, oval face, black eyes and hair, dark complexion, smooth face, very active in movements, fluent in speech, low, soft voice, general make-up and appearance rather effeminate, but in reality a desperate and determined man, extremely powerful, and a fine boxer."

"Well, Phenix, that is almost all we know in regard to the man," the superintendent confessed; "but, what luck have you had?"

"Pretty good, considering the slight clew I had to work on. That the man was a Gipsy, and that he was aided in his escape by a boat, was the main thing I had to go upon. I scoured the river on both sides for five miles above and below Sing Sing, in order to find out where the boat had been procured, and at last succeeded in finding a man just above Sing Sing, who had hired a boat to a woman to cross the river quite late in the evening. She had represented that she was going over to the town on important business, and would not probably return until late. She paid in advance, was directed where to leave the boat upon her return, and set out on her journey across the stream. She had assured the man that she was an expert with the oars, and, as he watched her pull out into the river, he saw at once that she was well used to the management of a boat. In the morning he found the craft just where she had been told to leave it, and heard, also, from a neighbor, the story of the convict's escape on the preceding night, but he was not shrewd enough to couple the escape and the hiring of the boat together; but I did, particularly when he described the woman as looking like a foreigner—dark-skinned,

black-eyed, an Italian, or something of that sort, he thought. Of course, when I heard this, knowing that Captain Molly was supposed to be of Gipsy origin, I inferred that, instead of an Italian, the woman was a Gipsy, and that it was she who had assisted the convict to escape. I reasoned from this that the most probable place of concealment for the fugitive would be in some Gipsy camp in the neighborhood of New York, if such a place existed. It did not take me long to discover that wanderers did have a camp right back of Guttenberg, and so, in disguise, I sought for my man there."

"Alone!" and the chief shook his head; "it was a risky thing."

"So I discovered, to my cost," replied Phenix, a quiet smile on his face, as the remembrance of how he had been handled came back to his mind. "Some of the boys warned me, too, to keep my eyes open, and my weapons handy, if I went for a prisoner in the Gipsy haunt; but I have been so used to putting my nippers on my man, and taking him out right from the midst of his pals, in the worst dens in the city, that I had grown foolhardy; I needed a lesson, and I got one. My bird was in the camp; I discovered and grabbed him; the next instant the Gipsies raised the alarm and I had a dozen of them on me at once. I fought all that I knew how, but the odds were too much, and the result was my man got away, and the Gipsies held me a prisoner for three days in their camp, to allow time for Captain Molly to get out of the way."

"Well, well!" exclaimed the chief, in amazement.

"These Gipsies are a peculiar sort of people," the detective continued; "they aided Captain Molly to escape—although, of course, they denied that it was Captain Molly—and fought me like a pack of wild-cats, simply because the man was a Gipsy—a brother—and it is their creed to stand by their people through thick and thin. They knew that the man was a rascal, and although they are not any too honest themselves, yet they had no share or interest in his deeds; in fact, they warned him that in future he must seek shelter elsewhere, when the dogs of the law were baying at his heels. As I have said, they held me a prisoner three days so as to give him a chance to cut and run, thinking that in that time he could get out of the way. I knew better, and so I didn't worry about the matter, for I felt sure that the fellow would assume some disguise and hang around New York. A big city, chief, you know, to these first-class rogues is like the flame of the candle to the moth—it has a fascination they cannot resist, although they know they peril liberty and life by yielding to the temptation. To come to the point:—Last night I visited a certain party, in disguise, in relation to another little matter which I have on hand, and after the interview, when I was out on the street, I was knocked on the head—a gentle tap with a sand-club, I imagine—and carried off bodily to some ranch well up on the bank of the river. From what there occurred, I suspect that, instead of my capturing Captain Molly, Captain Molly captured me!"

"By Jove, old fellow, this is a regular romance that you are relating!"

"Truth sometimes beats fiction all hollow, as I well know, and now comes the strangest part: I was aided to escape from a cellar dungeon by the same Gipsy girl, the queen of Little Egypt as they call her, who held me prisoner in the Gipsy camp and who was also, I suspect, the party who picked the convict up in the river. As I have told you, chief, I was engaged in a little private affair which I hadn't the least idea had anything to do with Captain Molly, but, after my little experience of last night, I begin to have an impression that the two matters, public and private, are intimately connected, and that whether I follow the track of the escaped convict or pursue this will business, at the end of either I shall run across my bird."

"Well, that is a new feature of the case!"

"Yes, and that is the reason why I am after information. I am getting deeply interested in this affair. Captain Molly is no common rogue but a first-class rascal. What was this manslaughter case in which he was the prime actor?"

"That was a mysterious affair, too. The man he stabbed was a pal. The excuse was that it was done in self-defense, and as there did not seem to be any reason for the crime except anger, he got the benefit of the doubt and was sent up the river instead of having his neck stretched, but I always had a suspicion that the victim was a pal, deep in the confidence of the other, and that he was killed to keep him from blabbing."

"And you do not know anything more about Captain Molly than what is set down in this report?"

"No; the man has only been in the country a short time, and of his antecedents we know very little. We suspect, however, that he is an accomplished rascal, and that he came across the water because the Old World got too hot for him."

"Do you know a gentleman called Elbert Van Tromp?"

"Yes, very well; and I knew his father before him—old Rutger Van Tromp."

"He's a high-toned fellow—one of the bloods?"

"Oh, yes; wealthy and gay."

"Do you suppose that there could be any possible connection between Van Tromp and Captain Molly?"

The superintendent looked surprised.

"No; I don't see how there could be; but what makes you ask?"

"Van Tromp was the man I called upon last night. I was in disguise, mind you—a Jew broker, and I flatter myself that I played the character to the life; I had a private interview with him about this will business; no one else was present; but, after leaving the house, I was assaulted. Now then, Van Tromp knew of course that I was mixed up in the will affair, for my errand to him was in regard to the will, and Captain Molly, if a tool of Van Tromp or a confederate, knowing that I was interested in the case, might have thought a point could be gained by kidnapping me, but if this reasoning is false—if there wasn't any connection between Van Tromp and this English Gipsy rascal, how comes it that I was pounced upon in the street? I am certain my disguise was so perfect that you, yourself, as long and intimately as you have known me, would have passed me by as an utter stranger."

"You are too much for me, Phenix; I can't explain the riddle; but it looks as if you had hit upon the right idea in assuming that there is some understanding between the two."

"I cannot make anything else out of it, and so, chief, I want you to put two or three good men on Van Tromp. Let them watch him by day and night—see who enters his house and where he goes when he leaves it."

"All right; it shall be done. Select the men yourself."

And Phenix did so. One hour afterward the watch began.

By day and by night Elbert Van Tromp and his house were watched as closely as the stars watch the earth when darkness veils the sky.

CHAPTER XXII.

FORCING THE QUEEN TO THE CONFESSIOAL.

TADCASTER slept at Castle Dismal that night, but it was well into the morning of the next day, to use an Irishism, before he retired to rest. He was busy plotting and planning. So far success seemed to crown all his efforts. He felt convinced that the man he held as a prisoner in the underground cell was the famous detective officer, and of all men Phenix was the one of whom he stood in dread; there was a natural antagonism between himself and this bloodhound of justice, and his keen instinct told him that death alone could end it. Either he must continue in some way to throw the detective off his track, or else, in the end, he would be dragged down. And the Arab dancing-girl, too—the fascinating Bel Amein—the wild, wayward child of the desert, who seemed in some manner to have become involved in his schemes—she was rapidly developing into an enemy, too! Surely he must strike quick and hard if he would save himself!

Long and earnestly the schemer thought, and he did not retire to rest until he had all his plans arranged, even to the smallest detail. But, in the morning, the first intelligence which reached him completely upset all his carefully arranged schemes.

One of the gang rushed into the room with the startling news that the prisoner had disappeared!

How this feat had been accomplished was of course a most profound mystery, for not one of the gang, except the chief, had any knowledge of the existence of the secret passage.

The outlet had been constructed to serve a certain purpose in a contingency which the schemer seriously hoped would never occur. In case of the house being besieged and surrounded by the police and all means of escape cut off, apparently, then refuge could be found in the secret passage, and when the shades of night came an easy means of escape could be found by way of the river.

That the prisoner had escaped by this passage was pretty certain, for the door was reported to be all right—securely locked—just as he himself had left it. Its key was in his pocket and the lock was a splendid one, so skillfully constructed as to bid defiance to all efforts to pick it.

The passage had been constructed by two men, both of them Gipsies; one was dead, slain in a brawl, and the other had returned to Europe. There was a chance that one of the two, although both had been sworn to secrecy, had revealed the existence of the outlet to the Gipsy queen; as they were bound in honor by the custom of their race to do.

If this was so, if Cynthia, Queen of Little Egypt, knew the secret, this might account for the mysterious disappearance of the prisoner, for Tadcaster had an idea that Cynthia would be more apt to prove his foe than his friend.

Delays are dangerous, so Tadcaster reasoned, and he was always prompt to act. He deter-

mined to seek the Gipsy camp at once with the purpose of forcing the girl to define her position. She must come out openly, either as friend or foe, and then he would know how to treat her.

There were a couple of boats attached to the place—the gang were always prepared for a retreat by water if menaced from the land side—and taking one of these Tadcaster pulled across the river, and in an hour after leaving Castle Dismal was in the neighborhood of the Gipsy camp.

Confident in his disguise (for he still—it must be remembered—appeared in the character of an Englishman) he walked boldly into the camp. In fact, he was rather anxious to try his disguise to ascertain if it was as perfect as he believed; and sharper, keener eyes—eyes more ready to detect any fraud of this kind—than those of the Gipsy he did not believe existed.

The Gipsies received him as they would any stranger, and upon his desiring an interview with the queen they conducted him to her tent. The Gipsy girl, too, did not recognize him until he spoke; then her ears keener than her eyes penetrated his mask.

"Ah, you will not be warned!" she exclaimed, a touch of anger in her voice, "you will still remain until at last the only service your people can render you will be a speedy poison for you to cheat the gallows."

"And will you, Cynthia, be friendly enough to perform that service?"

"It will be the last service I can render, and you may rest assured that, whatever you may do I will not fail."

"Well, that is a consolation, isn't it?" cried Tadcaster, in mockery; "but I am not as grateful for your kind consideration as I ought to be."

"Why do you stay—why do you brave—even invoke danger?"

"Why? Because I do not choose that you shall have everything your own way!" he retorted, hotly. "You are playing very skillfully, working in the dark—keeping your hand concealed, and yet dealing some ugly blows. You aided that detective officer to escape last night; why did you do so? You know that man is my bitter enemy—you know he has sworn to hunt me down. It is a life and death struggle. I gave him the trip and had him foul, but you thrust yourself into the fight, without cause, and undid all my work. What is the reason for this? Why do you take sides in the matter, at all? What is the Van Tromp estate to you? Upon my soul I have a suspicion that it was through you this detective came into the affair, for I feel sure he is acting on behalf of Rutger Van Tromp. He came to see the other Van Tromp in disguise, with a trumped-up story in regard to the will—from whom did he or any one else know anything about that will? You and I are the only ones who know aught of that document."

"And, what of it if all you say be true?" responded the girl, proudly. "Have I not as much right to take sides as you?"

"No! you have not, for you are acting without an object. What difference does it make to you who gets the property? What is one man to you more than the other?"

"Suppose I propound the self-same question to you?"

"Oh, my motive is easily guessed. I am to make money out of the affair. One man I can deal with, the other I cannot. Love of money urges me on, but your motive is not plain, although I think I can guess what it is," and a very perceptible sneer curled his lip as he spoke.

"Why do you charge me with interfering—why should you think I have taken any steps in the matter?"

"Bah! do you think I am an idiot?" exclaimed Tadcaster, impatiently. "Do you think I don't know all that has taken place? You must have a poor idea of my sense if you imagine I have puppets whom I do not entirely control. I know all that took place when Van Tromp visited the fortune-teller's, and does not Bel Amein speak with your voice? He was warned there to beware of me, and with the aid of the magic reflector—a very clever trick, indeed—my image was pictured upon the surface of the water in the basin. But, the device did not work, and although he could not detect how the trick was worked, yet he knew it was a trick and it did not influence him in the least. And, in proof of the truth of what I say, he hastened to reveal the whole matter to me at the first opportunity, thinking that I, perhaps, could explain the riddle. So I could have done, but I did not choose to let him into the secret, but I saw your hand in the affair in a moment and I determined to call you to an account as soon as possible. What is Rutger Van Tromp to you more than Elbert I again ask?"

"Go back to our childhood days and see if the remembrance will not answer the question. You, I and the two sons of Rutger Van Tromp were brought up together."

"Yes, and now you speak of it, I remember that you and Elbert never got on very well together. You were then a little, dark-faced, puny child, extremely ugly, and in your fea-

tures there was no promise of the beauty which since has come to you."

"And Elbert Van Tromp always played the tyrant; many and many a time he has both taunted and struck me."

"And the other interfered, as I now remember. He was always your friend and protector. Is that the reason you take his part now?"

"It is! As a woman I wish to repay the obligations which come from childhood's days."

"And you think, doubtless, with all the egotism of your sex, that if you can give him the fortune for which he is fighting he in gratitude may be inclined to reward the service?" Tadcaster sneered.

"I want no reward!" the girl cried, quickly. "Already the weight of obligation bears me to the ground."

"Oh, but there is a way in which he can pay you; he can marry you, you know. Aha! there is a 'consummation devoutly to be wished'; he will make you his wife, and he would, of course, only there happens to be another woman who holds his plighted troth and to whom he will be true in spite of all your fascinations."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DECLARATION OF WAR.

THE shot did not produce the effect which Tadcaster had anticipated; the girl did not change color, nor seem in the least agitated, and the man, always prone to believe evil, thought the girl remained unaffected because she did not credit his words.

"If you doubt me, the truth can be easily ascertained. I can give you the name of the lady and her residence, and then you can satisfy yourself."

"Who is she?" the girl asked, and both voice and face were free from any anxiety, much to Tadcaster's surprise, for he could not conceive that it was possible for her to be unmoved by the intelligence.

"Her name is Alida Gainsworth, daughter of old General Alexander Gainsworth, and she resides on Fifth avenue. It will be easy enough to find her; she is an heiress and a society belle; big odds against you, Cynthia, Gipsy queen!" sneered the man, maliciously.

"I am very much obliged to you for the information, although I do not scruple to tell you that you are not overwise to give it, for I warn you openly that I am your enemy as long as you espouse the cause of the evil-doer. Elbert Van Tromp has reason to think a will is in existence wherein justice is done to his half-brother, and he is anxious to find that will, not for the purpose of righting the wrong which has been done, but to perpetuate the wrong; but he will not succeed, and you, his tool, will suffer in the struggle. You have been warned to escape—aided to fly far from the scenes which know you so well, and yet you brave an outraged law by remaining."

"So, you have shown your hand then fairly, at last!" Tadcaster cried, white with rage. "It is to be war! So be it, since you will have it so, and the consequences be on your own head!"

"No, not on mine, on yours; you are the one who is likely to suffer."

"Oh! I suppose you mean to put the police on my track; that is the game, eh?"

"You are wrong; I shall not call for their aid except as a last extremity, and even if, through your own carelessness, you should fall into their hands, I would do my best to help you to escape for the sake of the tie which binds us together, which I regard although you do not."

"Words are cheap!"

"Let us have no more of words then; let us wait for deeds."

Tadcaster was dissatisfied with the result of the interview so far, although he had gained the important information that the girl, instead of being an ally, had become transformed into an open and active enemy. He turned to depart, his heart rankling with bitterness; then a sudden thought occurred to him which caused him to turn again to the girl.

"By foolishly venturing here, anxious to get you to define your position (for, although I felt certain that you had decided to work against me in this matter, yet I was determined not to take steps to counteract your influence until I was sure beyond the possibility of a mistake), I have allowed you to penetrate the secret of my disguise, and so really the game is all in your own hands, for all you have to do is to notify the police and I will be safely juggled."

"Rather would I cut out my tongue than betray you, unworthy as you have proved yourself of all protection!" she exclaimed, indignantly.

This assurance lifted a great weight from the heart of the wily plotter; he felt sure she would be as good as her word.

"I will simply content myself with parrying the blows you aim at Rutger Van Tromp and his fortune as well as I am able. Let me give you fair warning not to strike at his life. That is something I would not pardon, and I should then feel released of all obligations to keep your secret. Beware!"

"But you already hold victory in the hollow of your hand," Tadcaster observed, thoughtfully. "To you the secret of Ishmael was confided."

"Yes, to me, and yet not to me. I was not present at his death-bed, and so the secret was given to another with instructions to communicate it to me as speedily as possible, but as the party crossed the ocean in one direction I crossed in another; so the secret is not yet in my possession, but it will be within the next ten days."

A thrill of joy ran through the heart of the schemer as he listened to these words, for at last he had got a clew, but he carefully concealed his feelings.

"Well, if affairs stand that way, there is very little chance for me to make anything out of the business."

"No, not anything for you, therefore trouble yourself no more about it, for by interfering you risk both liberty and life," replied the girl, firmly. "If you are wise, you will follow the advice which I gave you only a little while ago—fly far from here; put as many miles of sea and land between you and this blood-hound, who has sworn to hunt you down, as possible, for thus only can you escape him."

"The advice is good, and I believe the best thing I can do is to follow it," and he spoke with such a sincere air even the quick-witted girl believed he was in earnest.

"If you are wise you will do so."

"I begin to think so, but I must have time to reflect. You will not betray the secret of my disguise?"

"The question is an insult to the race to which we both belong! Your secret is safe with me."

Tadcaster departed, not to reflect upon the advisability of flight, but to plan new schemes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SURPRISE.

TADCASTER returned to Castle Dismal. His mind was at ease on one point; it was evident the girl had so managed the escape of the detective as to preserve the old mansion secret, for, of course, if Phenix knew where the house was situated, the game was up. True, by persistent search, he might succeed in ferreting it out, so the plotter determined to shut the house up for the present—in fact, abandon it entirely. It was not the only Castle Dismal at his command, and his secret haunt No. 2, although a little further from New York, would answer his purpose well enough.

In spite of what he had said to the Gipsy queen, Tadcaster had not the slightest idea of giving up the fight, and his apparent willingness to adopt her advice and seek safety by flight, was but a trick to deceive her.

One important bit of information he had secured. The secret of the hiding-place of the will was not known to her any more than to himself.

"It is more than probable that it is buried somewhere," he reflected, as he pulled across the river. "It would be just like the old man, and true to the instincts of his race; he trusted no one, and least of all myself. But, who holds the knowledge of the secret? The person was present at the death-bed, most certainly, and that was old Hagar, his housekeeper, who is now in England. That agrees with Cynthia's statement. To Hagar she has written in regard to the matter. In ten days she expects an answer. Her letter, then, has barely reached England. I know Hagar's address, for she is at our house-of-call—the Gipsy meeting place in London. Suppose I use the cable and wire her at once, sending the message in Cynthia's name. The old woman is not particularly acute, nor are her advisers; it is beyond the bounds of possibility for her to suspect that there is anything wrong; I can state in my dispatch, too, that I—Cynthia—have written, but concluded, being in a hurry, to use the cable. Why, there is not one chance out of a thousand for the scheme to fail! The old woman will be sure to tumble into the trap, and the moment the precious information is in my hands, the game is won. The only thing I have to guard against is the girl; I am in her power, and she must be silenced; that will be a most difficult task to accomplish, though, for, if my agency in the matter should be suspected it will rouse all the Gipsy tribe against me. Then my fate would not be at all uncertain, for what the law has failed to do, they most certainly would accomplish. I must plan with care and skill, for a single misstep in this would result in my utter ruin."

The parian, whose hand was against every man, and who looked upon all mankind as his foes, began to plan a scheme which should deliver him from the power of the Queen of Little Egypt.

By the time he reached the shore the plot was ready hatched. He called in his confederates at once, and explained the situation to them, and more than one face in the group grew pale when it was made known that the escape prisoner was the well-known detective, Joe Phenix.

Tadcaster managed his "wolves" with great skill, and, so far, the police of the metropolis had found this band of rascals to be about the force the worst to cope with of any band.

ever known, which was the reason Phenix's services had been called upon.

In an hour after Tadcaster's return the old house was abandoned—the entire band proceeding to their other rendezvous, which was an old-fashioned two storied brick house on Houston street only a short distance from Broadway, and almost within stone-throw of the police head-quarters in Mulberry street. In selecting their house of call the rascals had acted on the old idea that the devil lurks in the shadow of the church. In the basement was a liquor saloon, while the upper part of the house was rented out for various purposes. With the saloon alone had the "wolves" anything to do. It was a quiet, respectable place to all outward appearance, being run on the English ale chop-house plan, and had, apparently, a good run of trade. In reality the proprietor had no reason to complain on this score, for the thieves' connection brought him in a good bit of money."

The saloon was divided into two apartments—the bar in front, while the rear was partitioned off into little stalls so that little parties could enjoy their meal in privacy. This was also with a view to the convenience of the gang. One particular box, the door of which was fitted with a lock and key, was always reserved for their use, and in that little room many a scheme of plunder had been arranged.

In going down-town Tadcaster and the gang separated, one only of the party remaining with him. This was a sort of a lieutenant to the Gipsy leader. He was a tall, smooth-faced fellow, with a decidedly ministerial air, which was rather increased by a complete suit of black, just such attire as a fairly-paid professional man would be apt to wear. Nine people out of ten would have taken him for a minister, and would have been quite certain of the fact when he came to speak, for he had a low, soft and sympathetic voice; and yet, despite his dress and mild appearance, he was one of the boldest and most successful criminals who had ever dared the powers of the law—a bank-robber, a confidence-man, a first-class rascal, yet so carefully had he always planned his operations that the officers of justice knew very little of him. He had been arrested three or four times but had always managed to escape conviction.

Obadiah Glide he was called, but among his pals he was "Silky" Glide.

The two men entered the saloon together. Only a couple of customers were in the place—a clerk and a carman, apparently, who had dropped in for a dram. Tadcaster saw that he had nothing to apprehend from either, so he and his companion proceeded direct to the private stall, in the rear apartment.

"Have a drink?" asked Tadcaster, as they entered and sat down.

"Yes, get a bottle of whisky while you are about it, for talking is dry work," suggested the other.

"I have nothing smaller than a twenty note," remarked the chief as he examined his wallet.

"Oh, he can change it, I guess; I'll see," and taking the bill Glide proceeded to the bar.

Hardly had he left the little room when a rough-looking man made his appearance at the door.

"Do not drink for your life!" the stranger exclaimed; "you are liable to be drugged and robbed. You are in a den of thieves!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE STRANGER.

NEVER had Tadcaster been more taken by surprise. The speaker was a great, burly fellow, with rather long, shaggy hair and a huge beard, somewhat roughly dressed, and altogether having the appearance of a well-to-do countryman, a farmer evidently. But only for a moment was Tadcaster off guard. Taking a good look at the man, he suspected that he was masquerading; the hair and beard he guessed were false—the rough voice and the country-like appearance assumed. In fact, he set the new-comer down as a detective, and it made his wrath rise to think that a minion of the law had managed to penetrate the secret of the quiet chop-house—that secret which, until now, no keen-nosed hound of justice had even suspected.

But, who the deuce was the fellow? Short as had been Tadcaster's sojourn in the country he was already well acquainted with every one of the New York detectives, that is, all connected with the police force. [It is a remarkable fact connected with the criminal life of all our great cities that the thieves and rascals are as a rule much better acquainted with the detectives than the detectives with them. Public or private, not a man of note connected with the detective business in the city who was not pretty well known to this chief of the Wolves.] The only exception was with Joe Phenix. Some way, it had so happened that he had not come in contact with the greatest of all the force—that is, with the exception of the time when he had held Phenix in durance vile, sup-

posing the prisoner whom he had placed in the underground cell to have been Phenix, and, in his own mind, there was little doubt in regard to the matter.

Was this Phenix?

Was this the man who, like the fabled Proteus, seemed gifted with the art of completely transforming himself?

In height and build he resembled the famous detective, but had so skillfully changed the appearance of his face, if it was Phenix, that there was not the slightest resemblance to the old Jew broker or to the man who stood revealed when the wig and beard of the supposed Jew were removed.

The affair was something of a joke, too, and Tadcaster could not help chuckling in his sleeve when he reflected what a swindle it was on the detective officer, since there wasn't much doubt that the stranger was a detective in disguise. The man had fallen into the error of supposing that he was a stranger, flush with money, and ignorant of the character of the house into which he had come. It was splendid evidence that his own disguise was perfect, while it was plain, too, that the stranger had recognized his companion.

Under the circumstances what was to be done? As Tadcaster puzzled his mind in regard to the matter the disguised man made the natural mistake of supposing that the other was amazed at his warning, and fearing that by some unguarded expression the Englishman might give warning to the smoothly-spoken Glide when he returned, the stranger hastened to repeat his caution.

"If you value your life do not drink with this man!" he exclaimed, in a hurried whisper.

"If you have money on your person you could not be in a worse den—you could not find a more dangerous one in all this great city. The chances are a hundred to one that you will be drugged—the liquor which will be offered to you will be 'hocused'; you will fall into a death-like sleep, and then the rascals will go through you for all that you are worth, and if the amount is so large that they think you will be likely to kick up a disturbance about it when you recover, they will knock you on the head and so settle the matter. The rogues who run this place will not hesitate at any crime if the booty to be gained is large enough to warrant the risk; therefore, do not drink anything but what I order, and be careful not to betray me. I'm a man whom you met at the hotel, you know—John Skank, from Ulster county."

The disguised bloodhound rattled this off with great rapidity, and just as he finished Mr. Glide made his reappearance with a bottle, a small pitcher of water and some glasses, and very much astonished indeed he looked when he beheld the stranger, who, in the coolest manner possible, had appropriated a chair and was stretching his legs out to their fullest extent, evidently very much at home. He pretended to be a little intoxicated.

Tadcaster, with all his wit, was considerably puzzled what to do. It was something of a joke that he, the chief of the Wolves, should be selected by a detective officer as an assistant in a plan to entrap one of the band!

"Hallo! how are you, neighbor?" the disguised man exclaimed, familiarly, as Glide paused, astonished, in the doorway; "come in! don't be bashful! Land-sakes! I reckon that I know you, or if I don't I oughter. My name's Johnny Skank, and I'm from old Ulster, I am, down here to York to see the sights. My friend, here, knows me like a book! I'm a regular old rounder I tell you—a ripper, and don't you forget it!"

Glide knew not what to make of all this, particularly as Tadcaster made no sign. That gentleman, afraid of the sharp eyes of the detective, feared that if he attempted to communicate with his satellite the other would discover his identity with the gang, and then all the fat would be in the fire.

The detective had turned to Tadcaster, and the latter saw that he must say something.

"Oh, yes; this gentleman is a friend of mine. Mr.— By the way what did you say your name was?"

Glide understood the case at once.

"Brown, Harry Brown," he replied, advancing and placing the articles he carried upon the table.

"Well, I reckoned that I had met you somewhere, but darn me if I could tell where or what your name was, anyhow, but I never was powerful good on names, no way you kin fix it!" the supposed countryman exclaimed.

"What have you got here?" and he seized hold of the bottle and smelt of the contents. "Whisky—and mighty poor whisky, too, it smells like. It won't do; my friend and I ain't drinking any whisky to-day. We want brandy, that is our tippie, eh, Johnny?" and he leered at the Englishman.

"Yes, brandy would suit me better, you know," Tadcaster remarked. "Suppose you get some?"

"Sartin; I'll fetch it in a min'ite," and the countryman withdrew, his gait extremely unsteady.

"A plant!" Tadcaster exclaimed, hurriedly;

"it is a detective who takes me for a greenhorn decoyed here to be plundere'd. He knows our secret; what do you think about it?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

A FEARFUL TRAIL.

"Who is it? do you know him?" Glide asked, amazed at the intelligence.

"No, I do not; his disguise is too perfect for me to penetrate it, but I think he is a stranger to me. I suspect it is Phenix, whom I do not know."

Glide had one of the odd, colorless faces so common to men who lead irregular lives, but, pale as it was, it became paler still when the dreaded name of Phenix was pronounced.

"Phenix, and he is in our power!" he cried, in a smothered voice.

"Yes, completely; and by his own art. Deceived by my disguise, and believing that I was about to become your victim, he revealed that he was in disguise in order to save me, and by so doing sacrificed himself."

"It is a life and death struggle between us and that man!" the lesser villain exclaimed. "We must either put him out of the way or else he will bring us all to prison or the scaffold."

"You are right; it is my own thought," Tadcaster admitted, a hard, savage look settling on his face; "we can no more afford to play with this sleuth, or to show him mercy, than if he was a rattlesnake coiled to strike. Get on the spring, and when I give the word let her go. I will work the syringe."

The reappearance of the stranger, bearing in his hand a decanter of brandy, interrupted the conversation at this point. The supposed countryman had played his part so well as to completely deceive the sagacious individual who acted as the owner of the saloon. He had come into the place, a short time before Tadcaster and Glide had entered, displayed his money freely, took a couple of drinks, and acted exactly as a countryman on a visit to "York" to see the sights, and on considerable of a spree, would be apt to act, so the Wolves' factotum had not the least suspicion that the fellow was anything but what he seemed. After his drinks he had called for a chop and when it was served had retired to one of the boxes to eat it, and so had been enabled to note the entrance of the other two into the private room.

Suspicious of the bottled liquor, he had insisted upon having the decanter of brandy which stood at the back of the bar, and from which customers were served, being sure that it was all right and not "doctored" with any drugs to produce insensibility. The bar-keeper, thinking that this was merely the freak of a drunken man, yielded to it and so the spy carried off the decanter in triumph.

"Here you are!" he exclaimed, as he entered the private room and banged the decanter down upon the table with almost force enough to smash it. "Here's the fluid to make your hair curl, and don't you forget it!"

Glide, in an endeavor to recognize the man through his disguise, was staring hard at him, and the spy perceiving it, at once took the alarm.

"What is the matter with you?" he demanded. "What are you a-gaping at me for? Did you never see a gen'leman afore, Johnny?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I meant no offense, I assure you; I was merely thinking that I had seen you somewhere before, for your face seems familiar to me."

"I've been in York afore! I'm no durned greenhorn, I want you to know, if I do come way from old Ulster. I'm a tearer, too, I tell you, country or city! But, fill up, boys, and let her slide! It's a long time 'tween drinks, I tell yer, when a man's thirsty."

And then he filled the little glass to the very brim with the potent liquor, and would have filled the others likewise had they not objected when their tumblers were half full. The glasses were the ordinary bar tumblers and one of them half-full of brandy was a pretty stiff dose even for an old soaker.

"Oh, lemme fill 'em up!" the spy cried, playing the character he had assumed in the most superb manner. "When you drink, drink; that is what I say! What is the use of tading brandy in thimbles or nut-shells? Well, if you won't, you won't," he remarked, desisting from his effort to fill the glasses, "so here goes!" and then, at one swallow, without even winking, he tossed off the contents of the glass much to the astonishment of the others. An idea came into Tadcaster's head that perhaps it was possible to get the disguised detective under the influence of liquor, when he could be easily disposed of. Both he and his companion were old drinkers, and he calculated that they would be able easily to floor the spy, provided he drank a full glass to their half one every time.

So Tadcaster pretended to be inspired by the liquor, and taking the decanter he filled up his own glass and then Glide's. There wasn't any need of pressing the other, for the moment the decanter reached the table he seized it.

"Whatever you do, drink fair, boys!" he cried, and again he filled his glass to the very brim, and down his capacious throat it went with a gusto which plainly showed that he liked the draught.

Still again the decanter went around, and the spy drank his glassful and grumbled at his companions for shirking good liquor, but no more effect did the potent fluid seem to produce upon him than if it had been so much water. The brains of the other two, however, were beginning to reel under the influence of their libations, and Tadcaster understood that matters must soon come to a crisis, for if he and his companion drank another "round" neither he nor Glide would be in condition for active service. The spy must possess a head of iron to be able to withstand the liquor, and there wasn't any deception about it, either, as Tadcaster, always suspicious, had at first fancied. The man was drinking fairly enough, and that the liquor was strong his own head could witness. The only solution to the riddle was that the detective was one of those peculiar individuals who could get just so much under the influence of liquor, and then, no matter how much more they drank, the effect was not increased.

So Tadcaster determined to end the scene.

"Well, gentlemen, you will have to excuse me," he said; "I must be going, for I have quite a long journey before me."

The signal was given; there was a peculiar click as though a strong spring, held fast, had been suddenly released, and with the rapidity, almost of thought, the whole floor, with the chairs, the table, and the men, sunk into utter darkness, the ceiling following, but the walls remaining stationary!

The trick was a very simple mechanical one, the apartment being arranged like an elevator and moved by heavy weights, and the moment the bolts, which were worked by springs, were removed, down went the cage, for such in reality the room was, and up went the weights. In the cellar four walls with neither windows nor doors in them apparently, received the moving floor.

Acute as was the detective, the descent of the entire apartment was something for which he was not prepared. He started to his feet and drew his weapons the moment he recovered from his surprise, and at the same instant the thought flashed upon him that he had, by his desire to save the supposed victim, the Englishman, from the trap into which he had fallen, betrayed himself into the hands of men who would not be apt to show him the least mercy.

With a cocked revolver in each hand he awaited the attack, for now he was sure that both of the two were members of the band, the Wolves, into whose lair he had penetrated and whose power he had braved.

The room was plunged into inky darkness; not a single sound could be heard to denote that there was any one in the apartment besides himself. And as he waited, a pungent odor floated on the air and a mist-like spray struck him in the face.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A MYSTERIOUS MESSENGER.

ALIDA GAINSWORTH sat in her boudoir, being robed for an evening party. Nino had just been musically chimed forth from the ormolu clock upon the mantelpiece, and the young girl's toilet was just completed, having occupied exactly two hours, much to the disgust of little Marie, the imported French waiting-maid, who, since she had taken service with the spoiled beauty, and that was not recently, had never known her to be so capricious and unreasonable as during this evening. Nothing suited her; her hair was "horrid," after the girl had arranged it with great care; the pearls must be taken off and diamonds substituted.

"Girls going to be married always wear pearls!" she declared, petulantly, "and I am not going to be married yet awhile, and I don't wish any one to think that I am."

And Marie, in her artfulness, at once surmised that this was what was troubling her mistress. She had suitors enough, but she couldn't make up her mind which one she liked best, and the fact worried her.

At last, however, her toilet had been completed, not to her satisfaction though, for in the state of mind she was now in to be satisfied with anything was an impossibility, but she said, impatiently; it would do, much to Marie's relief: then she descended to the parlor to wait for her escort. That escort was Elbert Van Tromp, and she had half-promised her father to give the young man a decided answer that evening, and, although she had not openly said so had implied that the answer would be a favorable one.

And now she was angry with herself—with everybody—all the world, because she had so decided.

In truth, she about had made up her mind to sell herself. Elbert was wealthy; the other, Rutger, was comparatively poor, and though she liked the latter the best, she shrunk from what the world would say if she yielded to the

dictates of her heart and wedded him. To do so would be to lose *caste*; her fashionable friends would pity her because she had made so poor a match. She felt that she would be "poor-thinged" to her face—behind her back certainly, and the thought was as wormwood to her.

"I know what they will all say if I marry Rutger," she murmured, as she lolled back in the embrace of the cushioned arm-chair by the window, and looked out upon the darkened street. "They will all, with so many expressions of sympathy, be so sorry for me that I married him, not because I loved him but because I couldn't make any better match. Oh, how I hate their tattling tongues and their false friendship! There isn't one of them who wouldn't be glad to have a chance to make faces at me behind my back, but they shall not have the chance. I am not going to make a fool of myself and yield to this silly passion. The other one is a great catch; father is right about that, and there isn't a girl in our set who wouldn't be glad of the chance, and I should be an idiot to reject the one and take the other."

The tinkling of the door-bell at this point interrupted her meditations.

"That is Elbert now," she murmured, looking out into the street, expecting to see his elegant equipage standing before the door, but it was not there, and upon consulting her watch, an elegant little trinket richly ornamented with diamonds, the gift of the man for whom she waited, she found it was only a few minutes after nine, and he was not to come until the half-hour.

"Some one to see papa, probably," she remarked, leaning back again listlessly in the chair and resigning herself to thought.

The appearance of the negro servant at the open parlor door interrupted her meditations.

"A lady axes to see you, miss," the servant announced.

"Who is it?"

"Dunno, miss. I axed her fur her keerd an' she sed dat it didn't make no difference, 'ca'se you didn't know her anyhow, but she wanted to see you on very 'ticular business."

The lady understood what such calls as this meant as a general rule—begging appeals in nine cases out of ten, either personal or for some society.

"Well, I suppose to see her will be the easiest way of getting rid of her, so you can show her in." The girl was not sorry for the interruption, she really desired to get away from her own thoughts.

"Yes, miss; 'deed, miss, she ain't one ob de common kind, or else I wouldn't have luff 'em in," the man remarked, understanding the suspicion that his mistress had in regard to the applicant.

The servant departed, to speedily usher in the visitor.

The stranger was a tall, graceful girl, habited completely in black, and wearing diamonds of such beauty that the rich gems which adorned Miss Gainsworth paled their luster in comparison. And this caller was beautiful, too, a rare and strange type of beauty not common to this land—a dark-hued face, lit up by great, glorious black eyes—the daughter of some southern clime, evidently, where the blood flows with more heat than in our frigid zone.

Alida rose to receive her visitor, and the surprise she felt was plainly mirrored on her face.

The contrast between the two girls, both just about the same age, was great—Alida with her blue eyes, blonde hair, and red and white complexion; the stranger, with her great black eyes, hair as dark as the shining raven's wing, and olive-tinged face, the skin of which seemed so transparent and thin that the rich blood beneath appeared likely to surge through at the slightest provocation; and the pair, as they stood face to face, surveyed each other with eager curiosity.

The face of the unknown was as a blank—calm, placid, and unconcerned; yet, as Alida looked upon it, a sudden thrill shot through her heart, as if instinct told her that the strange beauty was no friend.

Another thing, too, about the visitor: her face seemed strangely familiar to the spoiled child of fortune, but, for the life of her, Alida could not tell where she had ever seen it before.

"Miss Gainsworth, I trust you will pardon this visit from a stranger," the caller began, after the exchange of glances, "but the excuse is, that I come upon a matter of vast importance to you, if report speaks truth."

It was a strange beginning and Alida wondered at it.

"The subject is a delicate one, and I trust you will have the kindness to forgive me for meddling in matters in which, apparently, I have not the slightest concern."

More and more mystery, and Miss Gainsworth opened her blue eyes widely.

"If report speaks true, there are two suitors for your hand whom you favor above all the rest of the gentlemen who pay you court, and those two are half-brothers, Rutger and Elbert Van Tromp."

There was a little glint of fire in the orbs of Miss Gainsworth; she was not pleased with the recital of her love affairs, evidently.

"Bear with me and be not offended," the stranger continued: "I must speak plainly, and to the point, else my errand here will be fruitless."

"Go on, although I am at a loss to understand how my affairs can concern you in the least," Alida remarked, haughtily.

"I cannot very well explain, but the circumstances are such that I am compelled to say certain things to you, only as an agent, though, not as a principal. But, to resume my task. Report states that your father, like a prudent man of the world, favors the suit of Elbert, and opposes your union with Rutger, simply because one is a man of great wealth, and the other is not."

"Miss, I do not really understand why you should trespass upon my patience with the recital of this gossip."

"Grant me but a few minutes more, only. Report states, also, that you are too good a daughter to go against your father's wishes, and that, therefore, you will give your hand to Elbert, in compliance with his request, although if you were left free to choose, the dictates of your heart would incline you to Rutger."

"Miss, you are really presuming too much, and I cannot consent to listen any longer to this idle talk!" Alida exclaimed, a frown upon her beautiful face, for even the cold, bare statement, without any sentiment, cut her to the quick, since it was the truth; gold was outweighing love, and the warm impulse of her heart was giving way to the sordid calculation of her head.

"Do not be angry, but learn to thank me when I tell you that soon your father will change his tone," the other continued, perfectly impassive. "Instead of urging the suit of Elbert, he will be perfectly willing that you should wed with Rutger, if your heart impels you so to do."

Astonishment was now plainly written upon Alida's face, and she did not attempt to conceal her amazement. Better than any one else she knew how firmly the mind of the old general was fixed upon her union with Elbert; a hundred times, at the least, he had spoken of the matter, and, referring to the wealth which the young man had inherited from old Van Tromp, had remarked what a pity it would be if she did not have the spending of some of the money, when it could be had for the asking; that her father should change his view, and give up the project upon which he had set his heart, was extremely improbable.

"Of course it is impossible for me to guess from whence you derive your knowledge but I feel sure that your statement is not correct. My father is not likely to change the opinion which he has in regard to this matter."

"He will change, and I will tell you why," the other replied. "Within a month the colossal fortune of Elbert Van Tromp which appeals so strongly to your father's imagination will have taken unto itself wings; he will lose half of all that he possesses, and the half which he loses Rutger will gain."

Alida was wholly incredulous; it did not seem possible.

"When the wealth is evenly divided between them your father, no longer dazzled by it, will not be apt to urge the suit of one in preference to the other; and the world, too, will cease its cry that a woman is foolish to marry a poor man when she can have a rich one."

"Oh, but what you have said is so utterly improbable!" Alida protested.

"Wait but a single month and you will see that my words will come true. That is all I have to say. Be not hasty in coming to a decision—that is, if your heart *does* incline to Rutger; wait, and you will be free to choose unbiased by any one. Now my task is done." And the stranger with a slight bow turned to depart.

"But stay!" cried Alida, greatly excited: "how is it that you possess this knowledge, and why do you interfere in the matter? What interest do you have in the case?"

"You must excuse my answering that question."

"Did Rutger send you?"

"No more than Elbert."

"Who did then?"

"Justice!" And without another word the woman quitted the house. On the steps outside, she encountered Elbert Van Tromp who was just ascending. The unknown had drawn her veil over her face, and as it was quite dark outside, the young man was unable to recognize her although the figure seemed familiar to him.

"No, no, it cannot be!" he cried, as he watched her depart, "what would she be doing here, in this house? and yet, is it possible that there can be two such graceful creatures in this world?"

Fate was against Elbert that night, for he did not receive the answer which the general had told him he might expect. Again the capricious belle said "No."

CHAPTER XXVIII.
WAR TO THE KNIFE.

THE moment the disguised detective felt the moist-like moisture on his face he understood the game. He remembered the stories which he had heard, of how they had subdued refractory patients in the lunatic asylums—men who had gone raving mad and whom it was dangerous to approach. Instead of risking precious lives in a conflict with such violent madmen, through the bars of their cell doors by the aid of powerful syringes, potent stupefying mixtures were showered upon them and so the maniacs were subdued.

And this was the plan now being tried on him.

Already he began to feel the effects of the sense-entrancing drugs; doubtless the room was so contrived that it was almost air-tight, and his passing into insensibility was only a question of moments.

But, the detective was quick to understand, and down upon his knees he sunk and then stretched out flat upon the floor, just as if he had been overcome by the powerful narcotic. But, the moment he was down he crawled to the wall and drawing from his breast a strong six-inch-bladed bowie-knife, tried it cautiously upon the wooden partition (for such only was the wall of the "cage") until he found a crack where the boards joined. It was an easy matter to thrust the knife through the frail obstacle, and when it was withdrawn, through the aperture thus made the cool fresh air rushed. And lying with his face downward, drinking in the welcome draught, the pungent odor had very little effect upon him.

Ten minutes of suspense followed—ten minutes of silence, then the "Wolves" without, not hearing any sound within the room, and believing that their victim had succumbed to the vaporized drug, suspended their efforts in this direction.

The room was so contrived that there were two secret doors in one of the walls; through these the outlaws had retreated; and now, believing that the victim was completely overcome by the drug and therefore helpless, Tadcaster lighted a dark-lantern which stood near at hand in readiness for just such an emergency and entered the apartment, followed by his companion.

Cautiously the pair proceeded, for they were as wary as foxes, and seldom threw a chance away, but when they peered cautiously into the room and saw the prostrate figure extended at full length upon the floor, apparently perfectly helpless, they were satisfied that the detective was completely in their power as if he had been bound hand and foot; so the two advanced into the apartment.

"Well, I flatter myself that this was about as neat a job as ever was worked," Tadcaster remarked, as he stood in the center of the room and gazed with a great deal of satisfaction at the prostrate man.

"Very neat indeed, but now the question before the meeting is, who the deuce is the fellow?"

"That question can be easily answered by stripping off his disguise, but I have a suspicion that it is Joe Phenix."

"Right you are!" the detective replied, on the instant, rising suddenly to a sitting position and leveling a pair of cocked revolvers at the astonished rascals. "Surrender, or I shall have to be under the disagreeable necessity of drilling holes right through you. I am Joe Phenix, and you are both my prisoners."

Never were two men more thoroughly taken by surprise, and for a moment they glared with angry eyes upon the skillful detective, but, in the flashing orbs of Tadcaster, Phenix detected that he had an idea of resisting.

"Don't attempt to escape or your blood will be upon your own heads," Phenix continued. "You are my prisoners, and if I can't take you living, then I will take you dead!"

The tone in which he spoke showed that he fully meant all that he said, but he had to do with a man fully as desperate and as reckless of his life as he himself, in Tadcaster. Glide, on the contrary, was but a common rascal, and when he found that he was in a tight place, in the language of the street he "weakened" at once.

"Hold on! don't shoot! I surrender!" he cried, abjectly, cowed by the threatening tubes of the leveled revolver.

The chief of the Wolves was made of sterner stuff, though. Down from his hand went the lantern, and in an instant he precipitated himself upon the detective.

With the fall of the lantern of course utter darkness ensued.

Quick and unexpected as was the action yet Phenix was not altogether taken by surprise, and hardly had the light left the hand of Tadcaster when the quick, sharp reports of the revolvers followed.

A yell of pain came from Glide as he sunk down, badly wounded, but the other seemingly bore a charmed life, for, though he was so near the detective that it seemed a clear impossibility for him to escape, yet the bullet touched him not, and in another moment he and Phenix were locked in a desperate struggle.

Apparently all the advantages were in favor of the detective in size, weight and skill, but in this instance he grappled with a man who was well versed in all the tricks of the Cornish wrestlers, and so, almost before Phenix comprehended what the other was up to, by a dextrous twist Tadcaster upset and bore him heavily to the ground; but here the villain's advantage ended, for he had not succeeded in stunning his man as he had anticipated; if he could have done so, the keen-edged knife which he always kept concealed in his breast would speedily have ended the struggle.

But, now that they were on the floor, entwined together like two serpents, Phenix's superior weight and strength began to tell.

Tadcaster felt that he was gradually growing weaker, and in vain he strove to shake himself loose from the terrible embrace of the detective; a half-dozen times he essayed to grasp the throat of his foe, hoping to choke him into insensibility, but each and every time Phenix frustrated the attempt and compelled him to exert all his efforts to keep the officer from playing the same game on him.

Finally growing exhausted, and realizing that he could not hope to continue the struggle, Tadcaster managed to draw the knife from his breast and slashed desperately at his opponent with it. The cut of the steel surprised Phenix and caused him for a moment to relax his grasp upon the other's clutch the knife.

Profiting by this, Tadcaster let go of the knife and sprang to his feet, satisfied now to escape if he could.

Phenix was quick to follow, but in the darkness the "Wolf" had one great advantage—he was well acquainted with the peculiarities of the room and the other was not; therefore Tadcaster found it an easy matter to make his way to the secret door and by passing through it to escape from his persistent foe.

The keen ears of the detective caught the click of the lock as the door closed, and at the same time his foot struck against the lantern which Tadcaster had dropped.

He understood what the "click" meant; his game had got away, but had left him in possession of the field, and of one captive.

CHAPTER XXIX.
ON THE SCENT.

PHENIX had received an ugly slash in the breast from the knife and could feel that he was bleeding; he judged, though, that the wound was not serious, for the pain was slight.

His antagonist had got away and the darkness baffled pursuit, but the other one, who had fallen a victim to his pistol-shot, was safe enough.

So the detective, picking up the lantern, proceeded to relight it, and when he flashed the rays of the light around the room, to his amazement he discovered that he was the only tenant. Glide, although badly wounded, had taken advantage of the struggle to make his escape.

It was a barren victory for Phenix, after all. One advantage only had he gained. Just by accident he had discovered the disguise in which Captain Molly was masquerading, for he felt perfectly sure that the supposed Englishman was in reality Captain Molly in person. He had discovered, too, the secret of the robbers' haunt and ascertained how it was that they managed to entrap their victims.

Now that he was fairly on Captain Molly's track he must be hunted down before he had time to slip into a new skin.

A new idea flashed into the detective's mind: Captain Molly as the Englishman was one of the "bloodes," evidently—a swell of the first water; might it not be possible that there was some connection between the outlaw and young Van Tromp? And would it not explain the mysterious attack upon him after leaving the Van Tromp mansion? This Phenix felt sure would pay for examination, and the quicker he took up the trail the better.

With the aid of the lantern it did not take him long to find one of the secret doors; there were four in the room—one in the center of each wall. A pick-lock key, which he commonly carried in readiness for just such emergencies, easily shot back the bolt of the lock which the felon had taken care to make secure so as to stop pursuit.

Passing through the door Phenix found himself in the cellar. In one corner was a flight of stairs leading upward, and ascending these he found himself in a small room in the rear of the saloon. Passing out into the entry he came upon the door of the apartment wherein the scene which we have described took place. The apartment was there, just the same, as Phenix could see through the open door, although floor and ceiling had so mysteriously descended, but this riddle was easily explained; the side walls of course did not descend, and the ceiling of the first apartment, when it sunk, became the floor of the second. It was about as ingenious an affair as Phenix had encountered in all his experience.

He passed from the rear into the front saloon. A couple of strange men were there busily engaged in examining the place and apparently

taking an account of stock. The fat, burly, Englishman-like fellow who had presided at the bar was gone.

The two men suspended their work and looked up in astonishment as Phenix appeared; they were a couple of stolid fellows; and the detective instantly concluded that, if rogues, they appeared more like honest men than any rascals he had ever encountered; but he proceeded to business at once.

"Where's the proprietor, and what are you doing here?"

"Well, we are the proprietors," responded the elder of the two men, looking rather astonished.

"You the proprietors? How long since?"

"About ten minutes," and the man proceeded to explain how he and his companion had been negotiating to buy out the saloon, for some time, and had come in to see about it, and the bargain had been abruptly concluded. The proprietor had the papers all made out, had signed them, received his money and stepped out.

It was all plain. The instant the rascals had discovered that he was in possession of their secret, they had made up their minds to kill him, anyway, and at the same time get rid of the saloon, arguing that if one detective knew the secret it was probably known to others.

But, clearly, these men were innocent of any guilty knowledge; and now, with this latest dodge of the Wolves, Phenix realized more than ever that he had the job of his life before him to hunt them down.

"Did two persons come through the saloon about five minutes ago?" he demanded.

The men shook their heads; not a soul had they seen.

There was some rear way of escape, then; so Phenix proceeded to the little yard in the rear. As anticipated, there was a gate leading into the next yard, and from that another gate led into the street.

The detective did not trouble himself to return to the saloon but proceeded to police headquarters.

"Aha!" exclaimed the superintendent, as he entered; "you have come just in the nick of time. Here's a report from the Van Tromp house, and I judge it is an important one." And the superintendent nodded as he spoke toward a miserable-looking old blind man, wretchedly attired, with a green shade over his eyes and a tin sign, "I am blind," suspended upon his breast by cords from his neck.

So perfect was the disguise that even Phenix did not recognize the man until after he had pushed up the green shade, and winked significantly, with eyes that evidently had plenty of sight in them; then he saw that it was Detective Irving—one of the best men on the "force."

"Hallo, Phil! is that you?" Phenix exclaimed. "May I be hanged if your get-up wasn't too much for me."

"Well, I reckon it ain't bad," the other replied, complacently, and then proceeded to tell his tale.

In his disguise he had shadowed the Van Tromp mansion in the most complete manner. As a blind man seeking alms, his presence upon the steps of a house opposite excited no suspicion; but his watch had not been rewarded with anything worth noticing until about twenty minutes back. Then a man had walked leisurely up the street—a well-dressed, English-looking fellow—here Phenix's eyes snapped—and Irving noticing it laughed; he guessed that he was on the right scent. The man had absolutely nothing whatever about him to excite suspicion, and the disguised detective would never have thought that there was anything wrong about him if, just before entering the house, he had not cast a quick look up and down the street, as if to ascertain whether he was watched or not.

This action was suspicious; no man but one hunted for his life would betray any such anxiety; so Irving, guessing that the bird was in the net, hurried to headquarters.

"It is our man, for a thousand dollars!" Phenix cried, betrayed into unusual excitement. "Give me a warrant, chief, at once, and I will have salt on the tail of that bird before he is an hour older."

Phenix was confident, but—"there is many a slip between the cup and the lip."

CHAPTER XXX.

CLOSER AND CLOSER.

WHILE the chief was making out the necessary authority to enter the house, a sudden idea occurred to the detective.

"You have just come from the house?"

"Straight."

"And you left the moment he entered?"

"Yes, after he got fairly inside. Oh, you need not be alarmed about that. I didn't give him a chance to tumble to my game."

"You haven't got my idea, exactly; but, suppose that before we can get there he shifts his quarters?"

"That is all provided for, you bet!" Irving assured. "You left word that the thing was important, and I went at it as if there was a

thousand dollars reward at the back of it. My place, as a watcher, was taken by Blind Mag."

This woman, by the way, is one of the most remarkable spies ever connected with the police force of New York. She was, apparently, a slender, feeble-looking old lady, nearly blind, but in reality enjoying very good eyesight—a common street beggar, to all outward appearances, but really a spy in the pay of the police, and about the most useful one attached to the department, being able to do work that a man cannot accomplish.

Phenix nodded his head in approbation.

"Blind Mag was at the corner of the street ready to relieve me in my watch, and when she saw me get up and levant, she came quietly along and took up her post on a door-step, three houses down the street. I gave her the sign, when I got up, that the Englishman was the bird."

"And if he comes out?"

"Mag has relays at both ends of the block, and she will give the signal for one of them to take up the trail."

"Good!" exclaimed the superintendent, who had now finished the warrant, and who had been paying particular attention to the conversation; "but, how about the rear of the house? any alleyway there, so that, while you have the front of the house guarded, the game can slip out at the rear?"

"Oh, yes, there's an alleyway."

And from the way in which he spoke, both of the listeners guessed that that avenue had not been neglected.

"Yes, there's an alleyway, and Italian Mike, with his rag-bag and stick, is meandering up and down, and, as the old man is naturally lazy, and generally appears to be under the influence of liquor, I shouldn't be surprised if he should lie down and take a quiet snooze in some convenient corner."

Italian Mike was another police spy who had proved himself extremely useful. An Irishman by birth, an Italian by marriage and adoption, he combined in one person the craft of both nations.

"And then, too, Mike has a patrol at both ends of the alley," the detective continued. "So you may rest easy; our man cannot get out front or rear without being dogged by our fellows. But for my part I don't think there is the least danger of his trying it on. If I am any judge of faces—and I flatter myself I am—the man was hunting his hole. He had been mighty close run by somebody and was anxious for shelter."

It was remarkable how closely this human hound had guessed the truth from a casual glance at the face of the "wanted" man.

"You're pretty near right, Phil," Phenix remarked; and then he related his adventures in the English ale house. The others listened with deep attention and marvelled at the extraordinary escape.

"But, you're losing time, boys," the chief suggested, when Phenix had finished.

"I won't detain you five minutes, Phenix!" Irving exclaimed, hurrying into the dressing-room which was just down the entry, and in a short time he reappeared, entirely transmogrified. No one looking at the spruce-looking detective would have believed it possible that he could have been the squalid, miserable-looking blind beggar. But, all the good acting is not upon the stage of the theater.

Away went the two, both armed, for they understood that they had to do with a desperate man who might, in his rage, make up his mind not to be taken alive.

When they came to the alleyway at the rear of the house, going up the side street, they encountered the detective who had been placed on guard lounging carelessly about.

"Everything is all O. K.," he remarked, as the two came up. "Mike is down in the alley asleep, in a doorway, and there hasn't a soul stirred there."

"Go up the alley; signal Gemmill to join you and both wait at the back gate until I call you in," Phenix commanded.

The man nodded and obeyed without words.

At the corner of the next street, which was the one upon which the house was situated, another poorly-dressed man, sitting upon a house-step, was deeply engaged in reading one of the morning journals. He looked up as the pair came along, but otherwise manifested no sign of recognition. This was another watch-dog.

"No sign from Mag, eh?" Phenix asked.

"Nary!"

"Come on; we're going for the house."

The man rose, put his newspaper in his pocket and followed behind.

Down the block the three proceeded. At the further end of the block a rather shabbily-dressed man was leaning against a lamp-post, apparently waiting for an omnibus. He was not, as far as could be seen, taking any particular notice of anything that was going on around him, yet when Irving, as he ascended the steps of the Van Tromp house, lifted his hat, in a careless sort of way, the man instantly left his lamp-post, crossed the street and came up to them just as the servant opened the door in answer to the tinkle of the bell.

"Mr. Van Tromp in?" inquired Phenix.

"Yes, sir."

"Will you say to him that some gentlemen would like to see him on important business?"

"What name?"

"We are strangers; the name is of no consequence."

The servant cast a rather suspicious look at the party. In truth, the two officers in the rear were not particularly respectable-looking fellows, but, as sneak-thieves don't come in the middle of the day, nor in bands of four, the servant concluded it would be safe to allow them to remain in the entry while he notified his master.

Van Tromp came at once, and Phenix fancied there was a look of uneasiness upon his face when he beheld such a number of visitors in his hallway.

The detective with all his acuteness was puzzled in regard to one thing: was Elbert Van Tromp a partner, a tool or a victim of Captain Molly?

"Mr. Van Tromp, I believe?" said Phenix, when that gentleman advanced with inquiry written upon his face; "these gentlemen and myself have come here on behalf of the insurance company to make the examination which our rules require in all such cases of heavy insurance as this." This was for the benefit of the servant whom the detective had noticed listening upon the upper stairs.

"Insurance, sir?"

"Yes," replied Phenix, coming right up to the other and speaking quite rapidly; "we are detective officers in search of an escaped felon who we have reason to believe is secreted in your house, but it is just as well that everybody shouldn't know all about it. As insurance men, experts sent to examine, we can go all through your house and make our search, and if we do not find our bird, why, no one is the wiser in regard to our visit."

One cardinal rule Phenix always bore in mind—never to appear as a detective officer if he could help it.

"Gentlemen, there must be some mistake about the matter, for this is not the kind of a house in which a felon would take refuge!" Van Tromp exclaimed, with a great deal of dignity, but to Phenix's experienced eyes it was plain that the speaker was more nervous and alarmed than offended.

"We have certain information that the party entered your house about thirty minutes ago—a rather young man, well dressed, Englishman; answers to the name of—" and here Phenix took the warrant from his pocket and proceeded to open it as if for the purpose of getting at the name.

Despite the self-control which Van Tromp possessed he changed color when he saw how close was the pursuit.

"There was a gentleman here to see me about half an hour ago—such a one as you describe; he was but a hotel acquaintance, and after a very brief call departed."

"Did you see him leave the house?"

"No, sir, I did not."

CHAPTER XXXI.

BAFFLED.

"AND for the best of all reasons," Phenix replied; "he did not leave the house at all."

"That is possible, I admit," Van Tromp had to confess, not at all pleased with the ugly position in which he found himself.

"You will permit us to search the house?"

"You have the legal papers necessary, I presume?"

"The warrant is here, sir," and Phenix tendered it, but Van Tromp declined. "Your word is enough, sir; you are free to proceed, and, as I presume suspicion may attach itself to me, I myself will show you all the house, from the cellar to the garret."

"If you will be so kind."

"You are quite sure that he did not pass out by the front-door?"

"Quite sure, for ever since the man entered, one of my men has been on the watch outside."

"Ah, I never thought!" exclaimed Van Tromp, suddenly, as if the idea had just occurred to him. "There is a rear entrance through the alleyway, at the back of the house. If this man is the felon you suspect, and had an idea you were on the look-out, he may have slipped out that way."

"He might, but, unfortunately for that theory, the alleyway is also guarded at both ends."

Again the dark look gathered on Van Tromp's face as he began to see how thoroughly these man-hunters had arranged the snare to hold their prey.

"Well, if you saw him enter, which, of course he did, and it is no object to me to deny it, even for the sake of aiding an acquaintance, and you are positive that he did not depart, why, he must be in the house, and you are quite welcome to him, if you can find him."

An innocent speech, but Phenix detected the ring of a double meaning to it.

"If you can find him!" Was the hunted man hidden away so securely that Van Tromp laughed at the idea of discovery?

Phenix kept his thoughts to himself, and, with his men, proceeded to the search, leaving one of his men on guard at the front door.

From cellar to garret they inspected every room and closet; and Irving, having served his time as a carpenter, sounded the walls for secret closets, looked carefully at the chimneys, to be sure that they were not merely ornamental imitations, and even measured with his eye, the distance between the ceiling of one room, and the flooring of the one above it, for, as he said to Phenix in a whisper, he had often heard of secret hiding-places being contrived between two apartments in such a manner.

As for Phenix, he devoted himself much more to Van Tromp than he did to the search, for, by the expression upon the young man's face, he fancied he could tell whether the search was "hot or cold," as the children say in their play.

But the young man soon detected this, and kept such careful guard over his features that the lynx-eyed detective read nothing in his face.

The scrutiny ended at last, and, as one of the officers observed, they had not left uninspected a hole big enough for a rat to creep into.

"I trust you are satisfied, sir," Van Tromp observed, as he stood in the entry to dismiss his visitors.

"Yes, satisfied that my man is too smart for me this time, but, how on earth he managed to get out of the house without my men seeing him, is a mystery. We'll catch him, though, at one of the depôts when he attempts to leave the city," Phenix declared.

The detectives departed, but the watch on the Van Tromp mansion was not given up, for Phenix was satisfied that his man was there, cunningly concealed, and that Van Tromp was not a victim but a confederate of Captain Molly.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A NEW DISGUISE.

PHENIX was right, too, in this; Tadcaster was in the house, but the net had been drawn around it so carefully that he had not dared to attempt to break through it. He had looked out of the window and in an instant discovered that the blind beggar-man was gone and that a blind beggar-woman had taken his place. This being suspicious, he proceeded to the rear of the house to see if the coast was clear in that direction, and there caught sight of the drunken rag-picker in the alleyway. That he was a spy Tadcaster well knew, and then realized that he was completely insnared.

Of this he immediately informed Van Tromp, who fell into a great rage.

"You rash idiot! What on earth did you come here for, and what have you done?"

"I came here because you have the best hiding-place I ever saw, and as to what I have done, I have done so many things in my time that it would be extremely hard work for me to particularize the exact offense for which I am now 'wanted,'" Tadcaster answered, coolly.

Van Tromp at first declared that he would not aid him, but Tadcaster speedily showed him that it would be foolish for him to quarrel with the man who, inside of ten days, would unravel the secret of the missing will; so the felon took refuge in the secret closet behind the book-case, and, as we have seen, completely defied the search of the argus-eyed detectives.

When the unwelcome visitors had departed, Van Tromp came up-stairs rather disposed to chuckle over the ease with which the hounds had been thrown off the scent, but to his astonishment he found that Tadcaster was by no means disposed to take a rose-colored view of the situation. In fact, the man seemed more sober than he had ever seen him look.

"Oh no; he hasn't given up the game," Tadcaster averred, when told of what the detective had said. "He knows very well that I am in the house somewhere, although he was not able to find me. He pretends to give up the search here, so that you will report the fact to me, but I would be willing to bet ten years of my life against a beggar's copper that his men on the outside of the house in various disguises are watching every avenue of escape, and that not even a cat leaves this house until I am discovered, no matter if it is six months, without being exposed to police scrutiny. You have no idea, Van Tromp, what a bloodhound this man is!" the hunted one exclaimed, with a bitter accent. "I, myself, with all my experience of the world, never realized what a fellow I had got upon my track until this moment, although some time ago I began to get the idea into my head that in all probability it would be a life-and-death struggle between us."

"But I say, how are you going to get away? You cannot stay here forever, you know."

"Oh, don't be alarmed about that; my wits are shrewd enough to cope with these bloodhounds if I have any chance at all. But for the future I must keep shady, that's all, or at all events until this hue and cry blows over. The chase is warm now and I must keep dark until it cools. I rather expected it would be so, and in a measure I prepared for it, and while I am thus forced into retirement I can attend to

that little business of yours—the Arab girl, you know.”

“Yes, and time is passing away rapidly, too; I must make the girl mine in a certain time or else I shall lose that bet I was foolish enough to make with Livingstone.”

“If you remember, I told you at the time you were not acting wisely in making such a bet, and I tell you frankly now that, without my help, you don’t stand a ghost of a show to win it.”

“Yes, but you can win it for me.”

“How much will you allow me for my trouble and the expense of the job? The expense will be a heavy item, I tell you.”

“Oh, I don’t care for the money; I am willing to spend all the bet; the only thing is not to let that puppy of a Livingstone crow over me.”

“All right; I will get to work to-morrow, but the execution of the job must wait for a favorable chance. The first thing for me to do is to get out of this trap.”

“How is that to be done?”

“The Englishman must disappear; have you an old suit of plain dark clothes?”

Van Tromp had such a suit and produced it, and then, inside of ten minutes, Tadcaster completely changed his personal appearance with the aid of a razor and a pair of scissors. The spruce, dapper Englishman vanished and a sober-faced, rather careworn man stood revealed. In this new disguise Tadcaster himself was not visible.

“Well, what do you think?” he asked, after the change. “Would any of the spies on the watch for your English acquaintance be apt to stop me for him?”

“No; for I must confess I should not recognize you.”

“If I can deceive your eyes I have nothing to fear except from this arch-devil, Phenix himself,” and Tadcaster ground his teeth as he mentioned the name.

“And do you think he would recognize you?”

“Yes; I fear I could not assume a disguise which would baffle his keen eyes, and in turn I do not think he could possibly so disguise himself that I could not recognize him. Do you know? I am afraid if I do not get out of the country I will swing for that fellow, yet.”

“Better keep out of his way, if you can,” the other suggested.

“And so I will, if I can, but he seems to have the scent of a bloodhound.”

After dark Tadcaster put into operation his plan of escape. At his request Van Tromp had gone out during the afternoon, and, having been posted in regard to the devices employed by police spies when watching a house, had returned with the intelligence that the place was indeed surrounded by a cordon of watchers, but so skillfully did these creatures of the law perform their task that Van Tromp would never have suspected them if Tadcaster had not put him up to their tricks and devices.

The plan adopted by the hunted man for his escape was a simple but dangerous one. The house was in a block nearly all the houses of which were about the same height.

Tadcaster’s idea was to ascend to the roof and pass along from house to house until he came to the corner one; to enter this by the scuttle and descend to the street. Of course he might encounter some of the servants or a member of the family, and be apprehended and handed over to the police as a burglar.

But the hour selected, just after dark, was dinner-time in all such mansions, and all the household usually were in the lower story.

The risk must be run. It was the only feasible mode of escape. Although confident that his disguise was perfect he felt sure that every person who left the house would be tracked, and if anything suspicious appeared instantly arrested; so, considering all the risks, he decided upon the roof expedient, hazardous as it was.

When the time came Tadcaster made the attempt, and as fortune seems to favor the bold so it smiled upon this daring adventure.

Tadcaster never encountered a soul from the time he stepped out upon the roof of Van Tromp’s house until he passed into the street through the door of the corner house, and upon the steps of this very mansion sat a police spy diligently employed in an unceasing watch.

Again the hunted felon had escaped Phenix’s well-laid snare.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ORACLE WILL NOT SPEAK.

In the reception-room of the fortune-teller’s mansion Bel Amein and the old man who kept watch and ward over the portal sat. A visitor had just retired, and, as the hour was late, a little after ten, there was not much likelihood there would be any more callers that night.

The girl seemed strangely depressed and the old man noticed it.

“What troubles you, my child? Why do you look sad and careworn as if some serious trouble oppressed you?” he asked.

“I cannot tell you why, but all this day I have been depressed in spirits; a heavy weight seems to hang like a leaden pall around my

heart; is it the presentiment of some coming danger?”

“Consult the stars; those solemn oracles of truth never lie to those wise enough to read their warnings,” replied the old man, gravely. To him the reading of the stars was not all a clever juggle but true as truth itself.

“I have, father Lemuel.”

“And what say they?”

“Nothing!”

“Nothing?” cried the old man; “are the utterances obscure and clouded?”

“Yes, so much so that I cannot distinguish anything definite.”

“That is bad—very bad,” the other muttered, with a doleful shake of the head. “Rather would I read the worst warning than have the oracle refuse to speak at all.”

“We are in the hand of Heaven, and come good or evil fortune it is our destiny, and we cannot escape from it,” observed the girl, perfectly resigned to what fate had in store for her; what is to be will be, is the accepted law and faith of the Romany race.

“Ay, that is true; we cannot escape our destiny any more than we can flee from our shadow when the sun shines; but sometimes destiny gives us the choice of two roads, and if we heed the warning of the stars we shall know in advance which one to choose, but it seems to be in our perverse human nature to disregard the warnings which are so plain to those who can read the language of the planets. History tells us of many great men, doomed to terrible misfortunes, who yet had ample warning, and if they had but chosen to heed the voice of the oracle might have escaped the threatened danger. Cæsar was warned by the soothsayers to beware of the Ides of March; Brutus was warned of the fatal result of the coming fight by the ghost of the murdered Cæsar, who appeared to him in his tent and declared that he would meet him at Philippi; Antony, when he gathered his forces for Actium’s fatal fight, obeyed not the voice of the oracle when it predicted disaster and death; and Napoleon, the favored child of fortune, heeded always the counsel of the stars, until the advance into Russia. Then for once the oracle refused to speak, and he in blind defiance of this—the greatest warning to desist from his project that could be given—rushed forth to lose an empire amid the snows of Russia.”

“But, what shall I do? I am not engaged in any enterprise; I have no project in view.”

“Are you not striving to hold the scales of justice with an even hand between the two men who are struggling so desperately together? Why do you not let things take their course?”

“And if I do, our brother will surely suffer.”

“Brother!” cried the old man, with fiery energy; “call not that base apostate, who for gold would sell himself and all his tribe, by the name of brother! Think not of him! He is an outcast, and I do not think I judge too harshly when I say he is a traitor who would sell his own flesh and blood if he could get price enough for the risk.”

“Blood is thicker than water,” reminded the girl, repeating the maxim respected by the wandering tribes since the world was young.

“You are right; and yet, if ever there was a case when we should forget that truth, it is in regard to this man.”

“Patience; he will not be here long. Already he realizes that he is not powerful enough to cope with the foes whom his evil practices have raised around him. Soon he will be forced to fly and then we will be rid of him forever.”

Old Lemuel shook his head; he doubted this. In his judgment, the career of the man would only end with the hangman.

The tinkle of the bell at the door interrupted the conversation.

“Another visitor,” and the old warder looked at the girl inquiringly.

“As you please,” she answered to the look.

“Take the money, and if you can read the stars for this stranger, perhaps the mists may clear away for you,” the old man counseled.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN EVIL DEED.

OLD LEMUEL went to the door, while Bel Amein betook herself to her sky-chamber.

The applicant was a rather tall, well-dressed gentleman, a man of uncertain age, neither old nor young, as the saying is, very mild-mannered and well-spoken, and yet with a certain something about him that impressed Lemuel unfavorably; but it mattered not to him, or to Bel Amein, whether the man was a rascal or not, so long as he paid the fee.

Briefly the caller made known his business; he desired that the stars should be consulted on his behalf. Lemuel demurred, at first; the hour was late; could not he call again?

The man was not willing to call again, and so eager was he to consult the oracle, that when Lemuel said the fee would be ten dollars, on account of the lateness of the hour, he accepted the terms, but remarked that, considering the price, he ought to be favored with a first-class fortune, a levity the old man rebuked at once.

“Your fortune will be as fate wills,” he re-

plied, gravely; “the stars speak nothing but the truth, and whether you pay ten dollars or ten times ten, it makes no difference.”

The stranger nodded as in acquiescence, and was conducted to the consulting room.

Bel Amein was not more favorably impressed with the visitor than Lemuel had been, but whether the man was good or bad was of little moment.

The caller looked around him with some curiosity upon entering, seemingly paying more attention to the room than to the prophet.

She had put the usual question to him in regard to the manner in which he wished his fortune told, and he, contrary to the generality of her customers, wished the stars to be consulted on his behalf, and had come provided with the necessary information, the year, month, day, and hour of his birth, to the very minute.

Provided with this data, the girl proceeded to draw his horoscope, as the paper is called which sets forth the predictions of the stars.

This occupied some time, and before she had half completed the task, the tinkle of the door-bell again rung through the house, announcing another visitor.

The girl arose from her little table, evidently annoyed by the interruption. Stepping to the wall she placed her ear close to it, by the side of the door, where, the visitor guessed, was a speaking-tube. And he was right, for soon the voice of the old man sounded from the wall.

“Another visitor—will you receive him?”

“No, not to night; I am busy and shall not be at leisure for half an hour, at the least, and then it will be too late,” answered the girl; then she returned to her calculations, and never in her life did she work more slowly. Everything seemed wrong, and she knew not what to make of it, unless the visitor had by some mistake supplied her with the wrong figures; if such was the case, it might account for it.

And when she arrived at this conclusion she looked up from her work and questioned him:

“Are you quite sure that you have not made some mistake in these figures? The difference of an hour, even, would render my calculation useless.”

“Oh no; the figures are all correct, I am certain in regard to that, but have you set them down correctly?” And as he put the question he rose and approaching her, leaned over the back of her chair so as to look over her shoulder.

“I wrote them exactly as you gave them to me,” and she proceeded to enumerate them, but before she had spoken three words, with a rapid motion the stranger seized her. He passed his strong right arm around her neck and pinioned her back to the chair after the fashion of the midnight garroter, and with the other hand he drew a sponge from his pocket and pressed it to her nostrils, first compressing it violently in his hand; this broke the little glass globe which was in the center of the sponge, filled with chloroform and the pungent, powerful narcotic began to ooze through the sponge.

Although taken entirely by surprise, for such a thing as a violent assault upon her by the stranger had never entered her mind, yet she made a desperate struggle. And she was a strong, powerful girl, too—much stronger than the man had given her credit for; despite his efforts to hold her down she rose from the chair and struggled toward the wall. All the efforts of the man were directed to retaining his grasp upon her throat and to keeping the sponge at her nostrils, knowing that if he could succeed in doing this, in a very few minutes the drug would overcome her and thus end the struggle.

The girl fought desperately to reach the wall, the more so because her senses were already beginning to reel under the influence of the chloroform; in the wall was the knob of an alarm-bell; if she could only succeed in reaching the knob, a single pull and the alarm would sound, bringing Lemuel in haste to her aid. Lemuel was an old man, but he always went armed after the fashion of his race, and, alarmed by the clang of the bell, he would be sure to come prepared for danger.

Slowly, foot by foot, she approached the wall, the stranger not striving so much to prevent her from reaching it as he did to retain his hold upon her and keep the sponge in its place.

At last she was within reach of the knob, and then, with a sudden spring, she released her grasp of the man and seized the knob. Too late to prevent the action the assailant realized what the girl’s object had been in struggling so desperately to reach the side of the room.

The peal of the alarm-bell rung sharply through the house, and then, overcome by the effort she had made, and yielding gradually to the effects of the drug upon the sponge which was pressed as tightly as a plaster over her mouth and nose, Bel Amein was able to offer but a feeble resistance as her assailant dragged her backward from the wall; but the alarm was given; soon Lemuel would come, and then woe to the wretch who had dared to commit this bold assault!

More and more feeble grew her struggles; despite her resolute will and the desperation with which she fought against the stupor, the chloroform began to overpower her.

Finally her resistance ceased, and she lay like a log in the arms of the assailant.

The struggle had ended, and none too soon for the bold doer of this atrocious deed, for he could not have continued the contest much longer.

CHAPTER XXXV. THE LONE HOUSE.

"CURSE the wench, how strong she is!" growled the man, heated and almost breathless after the struggle, and, releasing his grasp upon the now senseless Bel Amein, he let her fall, with a dull thud, to the floor. "If she could have held out ten minutes more, I should have caved in. Blazes! he said that it would be a tough job, but I reckon the next time he wants a woman choked he will have to get somebody else to do it. Why, she's a regular wild-cat!"

The speaker had now thrown aside his assumed manner and stood revealed as the man he really was—the unscrupulous and skillful Mr. Glide, the escaped felon, for whom the doors of half a dozen State prisons were yawning.

No time was to be lost, and Glide, as soon as he could get his breath, proceeded to complete the work which he had so brutally begun. From his pocket he drew a gag, which was a piece of wood in the shape of a pear, with a series of minute holes in it so that the person to whom it was applied should not be suffocated, yet was restrained from the use of the voice; with the gag came a little coil of stout cord, about as large round as a pipe-stem.

The gag he bound firmly in the girl's mouth, then with the cord he tied her wrists tightly together, so as to render her almost helpless.

And as he bent over his victim, putting the finishing touches to the job, he heard the sound of footsteps without in the entry. Instantly he suspended operations, drew a revolver from his pocket and cocked it, as if to be prepared for emergencies.

The door opened and a heavily-built, thick-set fellow appeared; he was well dressed, but the bull-dog showed in every feature.

This evidently was the visitor who had requested the interview which the seeress had declined.

No stranger this fellow, either, to police authorities, or to prison walls. "Pony" Black was about as well known as a desperate, determined criminal—careless as to what the crime was so long as the "swag" was heavy—as any man whose picture had formed a part of the Rogues' Gallery.

"All O. K. here," Glide observed; with a grin of satisfaction upon his sallow face; "how about down-stairs?"

"O. K. there, you bet!"

"You ought to have had this part of the job; the wench fought like a very devil."

"So did the old cuss down-stairs. Just look at my hand," and the speaker held up his left hand, which was tied up in a bloody handkerchief.

"Blazes! what's the matter?"

"Bit to the very bone, I believe," the other growled.

"You ought to have grabbed him sudden and choked him."

"So I did, but the old beggar turned on me and before I knew it he had my hand in his mouth!"

"That was rough!"

"Well, you bet it was, and he chewed on it as if he liked it, too. I had my steel out and I threatened him—told him I'd knife him if he didn't let go, but he was game all the way through, and he bit like a dog."

"You ought to have choked him!"

"How could I with only one hand?"

"But you got him quiet at last?"

"Oh, yes; he is quiet enough now."

There was a world of fearful meaning in the sentence, and Glide, catching the purport, drew a long, hard breath, while his face, always pale, became still paler.

"I say, Pony, you didn't go to use your knife, did you?"

"Why not? Do you s'pose that I am a dog to be chewed up like one?" the other returned, sullenly.

"Did you stick the old man?" and Glide's voice grew very low and husky. Villain and felon though he was, he shrunk from murder.

"What else could I do? I grabbed him by the throat so that he couldn't give the alarm, and he shook himself loose and fastened onto my hand while he clutched my wrist with his other hand. He was a plucky dog, too, and I reckon he thought he could whip me in a fair fight."

"Then you used the knife on him?"

"Well, I had to; any one would have done so caught in a fix like that," the fellow growled. "I only give him one poke, anyway. I didn't mean to finish him, exactly, but it did; he just straightened up, gave one gasp and then went down all in a heap."

"The captain will be madder'n blazes when he hears of it," Glide remarked, thoughtfully, "and he is an ugly man when he gets his temper up."

"I can't help it, I had to do it," the other answered, sulkily.

"And there's the danger, if it should be found out; they stretch a man's neck for a thing like that," Glide observed, nervously.

"After you have used the knife as often as I have you will get used to it," the ruffian answered, coarsely. "But, you didn't kill the man, did you?"

"No, sir; I'm no fool to risk my neck!"

"And you didn't see him killed, nor know that he is killed, because I'm such a 'tarnal liar that you can't believe half of what I say; and, anyway, you had better forget as quick as you can that you heard me say anything about it. There ain't anything to mix you up with the muss, and when we get the gal away, and the captain settles up with me for my share in the job I'll jest make myself scarce; there's a good opening down in Texas for men about my size and I reckon I will travel down that way. You don't know anything about it and you needn't know."

And so it was understood between the two, and the moment they came to this understanding they proceeded to get out of the house as fast as possible.

Raising the girl in his arms Glide carried her down to the front door; Pony accompanied him and made a careful examination outside, so as to be sure that there wasn't any obtrusive policeman or other watcher in the neighborhood. The two had a hack in attendance a few steps down the street.

The avenue was deserted; not a soul was in sight; everything seemed to favor the plan of the abductors. Glide, with the still insensible form, got inside the coach; shawls were in readiness there, and these he draped around the girl so as to conceal the fact that she was bound, and gagged and insensible. Pony got upon the box, representing the driver, and away they went. Straight to Broadway they proceeded and then directly down that great thoroughfare until South Ferry was reached. They crossed the ferry and then drove on toward Fort Hamilton, following the river road which ran alongside of the bay.

Not the slightest difficulty did they meet with during the trip; no one questioned them; no one seemed to take the slightest notice of either the hack or its contents.

Just about a mile or so this side of Fort Hamilton stands an old, dilapidated house, built 'way below the level of the road on the shore, close by the water's edge; and this house had been selected as the girl's prison. It was a lonely spot, free from observation, and in case anything went wrong, and the minions of the law advanced in force, the broad waters of New York bay offered an easy means of escape.

The hack halted; the seeress had by this time recovered from the effect of the stupor produced by the drug, but, although she had lost the use of her hands and her tongue she still had her eyesight, and this she determined to use to the best advantage. But the brains that had planned this daring abduction had thought of everything, and when the hack stopped the first thing Glide did was to bind a thick scarf over his victim's eyes; then he lifted her in his arms and carried her bodily down the hill to the house. Underneath it was a large cellar, for the house had been well built, although much the worse for wear now; the cellar had been fitted up expressly for the girl's reception, and had been made quite comfortable for such a dank, unwholesome place, for it was very deep, with but little ventilation. In this place the girl was to be confined.

As the reader has probably surmised, the captain of the Wolves, Tadcaster, was the man who had planned this high-handed outrage, and after the girl was safely in his clutches in answer to Pony's request he settled with him for his share in the deed.

Tadcaster had been liberal with his tools, for it was Elbert Van Tromp who footed the bills, and so Pony drove gleefully away with a hundred dollars in his possession as his share of the spoils, and no thought of remorse for the murder of the old man troubled his mind.

But it was fated that retribution was to follow hard upon the crime, for in a farewell drunken bout, that night, he became involved in a quarrel with another ruffian, as big a brute as himself, and in the row was badly cut. He was borne to a hospital and before morning his soul had taken flight.

CHAPTER XXXVI. A CONSULTATION.

FIVE days have elapsed since the night of the abduction. During that time the girl, imprisoned in the cellar, saw but one person; her food was passed in to her through the grating in the door by a masked man, who replied not to the questions she had put, and so, day and night, she had naught to do but to meditate over plans of escape.

Phenix, through his spies, had kept watch every hour in the twenty-four over Van Tromp's house, eager to secure his prey. Through his agents he had interviewed all the servants in the house, and had but little else than his labor for his pains. Tadcaster had entered the house,

but no one had seen him go out; yet it did not seem possible that he could be concealed therein all this time without some one of the servants being aware of it.

It was a mysterious affair, and the detective was obliged to confess himself completely baffled, but he was not discouraged; the greater the difficulties the greater his endeavors. Phenix had concluded that the bird he sought was not in the house, but had contrived to escape the close watch of the spies.

And, as for Tadcaster, fortune really seemed to favor him just now. He had used the Atlantic cable to send a message to England to old Mother Hagar, in Cynthia's name, asking her to telegraph the lying words of old Ishmael, and the woman, never suspecting that anything was wrong, had complied with the request. As he had expected, the message was in regard to a box containing some important papers which the old man had hidden away. Thanks to the information, he easily got possession of the box, which was a little, old-fashioned iron safe, and Tadcaster caused it to be conveyed to the old house, so that he could open it at his leisure. He was forced to break the lock, lacking the key, which the message across the sea made no reference to at all.

To both Tadcaster and Glide's surprise, no report of the abduction got into the newspapers; Glide being particularly astonished, for he had expected to read a thrilling account of the discovery of the old man's body, and a description of how he had come to his death, but not a word was there about the matter.

Had the wily New York ruffian been acquainted, though, with the manners and customs of the race to which the girl and the old man belonged, the mystery would have been a very no longer. Of course by this time the reader has doubtless penetrated the secret of the Arab dancing girl, and guessed that she had very little claim to kindred with the wild Bedouins of the desert—in fact, that Bel Amein and Cynthia, the Gipsy queen of Little Egypt, were one and the same.

The queen was in constant communication with her Gipsy band, and not twenty minutes after the departure of the two ruffians with the helpless girl, two of the Gipsies came to the house, and, being provided with a pass-key, easily gained admission.

Great was their amazement, and deep their anger, when they came upon the body of the old man, and, after a search through the house, discovered that their queen was missing.

Of course they suspected foul play, but whether the old man had been murdered and the girl carried off, was a mystery. In such matters it was not the habit of their race to call upon the house-dwellers to aid them; with their own hands they righted their wrongs.

Word was sent to the Gipsy encampment, and all the members of the tribe at once set out to solve the horrid mystery.

To one man only, outside of their own people, did they speak of the strange affair, and that was the detective, Joe Phenix. The Gipsies knew that he and their queen had been on good terms, and believed that Phenix would do all in his power to aid in the search.

Now Phenix, usually so "level-headed," was a little "off" on one point. He had followed "Captain Molly" so persistently—the chase had been so close, so exciting—the struggle between him and the escaped felon so evenly balanced, neither being able to boast of much advantage over the other—that Captain Molly had begun to haunt him like a specter. By day he thought of nothing but of plans to lay the convict by the heels, and by night, in his dreams, he pursued his game through all sorts of impossible places, meeting with a hundred improbable adventures. Like the Turkish sultan, who always cried out: "Seek for the woman!" when any crime was made known to him, so now Phenix saw—or fancied that he did—the hand of Captain Molly in everything evil.

The Gipsies, when Phenix suggested this to them, shook their heads.

"It is impossible," the big, black-bearded one replied; "no, he is wicked enough to do almost anything, but there is no motive for him to do this deed."

"Vengeance," suggested the detective! "she released me from his power, and being of a revengeful nature, if he happened to discover that she had anything to do with it, he would be pretty sure to desire to get even with her for it."

Again the Gipsies shook their heads.

"It is hardly possible," black-beard remarked; "they are brother and sister—both children of Ishmael Tadcaster."

The detective was surprised at this information, for, he had not suspected any relationship between the two, although he had been rather puzzled at the great interest which she had taken in the fortunes of the felon, but had ascribed it to the Gipsy instinct of sticking to one another. The secret of the girl's interest in himself he thought he had guessed. The Gipsy queen was in love with young Van Tromp, and she aided him, Phenix, so that he might fight Rutger's battles.

But now that he knew of the relationship be-

tween the two he was more and more convinced that Tadcaster had something to do with the mysterious tragedy. Captain Molly—Tadcaster, as he now for the first time knew him to be—was in league with Elbert Van Tromp, and to find the felon and the girl also all he had to do was to stick to Van Tromp like his shadow.

He explained his suspicions and the reasons that he had had for them, to the Gipsies, and they, listening with lowering faces, swore that if it was true, they would hunt Tadcaster down although in the effort they had to search the wide world over.

Now this did not suit Phenix at all. Captain Molly was his game and he wanted to "run him in."

He kept this idea to himself, though, for from the little he knew of the Gipsy character, he was satisfied that it would not be possible to turn them from their purpose.

And so the interview ended; the Gipsies departed determined to scour the country around the city thoroughly, and Phenix sought out his spies and redoubled his watch on young Van Tromp; he hung as tightly to his idea as a bloodhound to the hot trail.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE TRIP BY NIGHT.

It was a bright moonlight night; the clocks were just striking nine, and Elbert Van Tromp came down the steps of his mansion and walked with a careless, easy step, as if he were just out for a stroll, toward Broadway, but for all his easy, careless way, and his apparent unconcern, he kept his eyes well about him, for he had a suspicion that he was watched. In a short time that suspicion became a certainty. He was sure that the dark figure strolling along on the other side of the street was a police spy, and he kept such a watch upon this man that the other speedily became conscious of the fact, and the result was that after reaching Broadway this man disappeared, and Van Tromp was just beginning to congratulate himself when he made the sudden and unwelcome discovery that there was another man behind him who was paying him more attention than was agreeable. He understood the dodge at once; spy No. 1 knew that he was detected, and so he had given up the job to spy No. 2, and now Van Tromp resolved that he must not let the spy perceive that his mission was suspected if he hoped to elude him.

A plan to throw the fellow off the track soon came into his head. As he walked slowly along down Broadway he examined with a critical eye, every cab waiting for a customer along the street. He wanted a fast horse and a knowing driver.

Just below the Fifth Avenue Hotel he came to one that suited him—a powerful chestnut beast and a shrewd-looking Irish driver.

"Cabby, I am being followed, and I want to throw my man off the track," Van Tromp said, rapidly. "Ten dollars to you if you can land me at South Ferry by a roundabout way, without being followed by another cab for that will be the game!"

"I'm the b'ye that kin do it and my baste here kin beat anything on four legs that goes in New York! Jump in, sur!" cried the driver, jumping at once to the situation. He held open the door, Van Tromp sprang in, and then the driver mounted to the box and they set off.

Through the window in the back of the carriage Elbert watched the movements of the spy. As he had anticipated the man prepared to follow him immediately. He saw him run across the street and speak to a cabman, indicate with his hand the vehicle which Van Tromp occupied, then jump in and the second cab started in pursuit.

The pursued man at once made known this fact to his driver.

"All right!" exclaimed cabby, in the most confident manner; "me name is not Tim Gilhooly if I don't give the spalpeen a purty chase."

And he did it scientifically, too; he never turned his head to indicate that he had any idea he was being pursued, but, as he whirled around the corner of a street he contrived in the most natural way to get a glimpse of the other cab, so as to see what it was like. The carriage was good enough but the horse that drew it was a sorry beast.

"Faix! I'll take the wind out of him and not half try!" the Irishman muttered, with a grin.

And he was as good as his word. His plan of action was a simple one—he raced down one street to the river, drove down a block and then raced back again, and the pursuing cab not being horsed half as well, besides being detained by the passing cars upon the main avenues every now and then, was soon distanced, and then straight for the South Ferry the Irishman headed, and landed Van Tromp there, free from espionage.

The young man paid the driver, then made his way along by the Battery to where the boatmen land.

A small boat with a single man in it lay out in the stream, the occupant only using the oars enough to keep the boat from being carried away by the tide.

The moment Van Tromp appeared on the steps this boatman pulled in to the pier. It was Tadcaster in disguise.

"Jump in quick; you have not been followed?"

"Yes, I have, but I took a cab and threw my man off."

"Good! We are all safe, then, for the water leaves no trail."

The moment Van Tromp was in the boat away Tadcaster pulled. The tide was on the ebb and the light craft made rapid progress seaward.

A lot of houseless vagrants were stretched out in the park near by, enjoying the balmy breeze from the water, and as the boat vanished one of these tattered and torn men sprang to his feet and ran like a madman toward Broadway.

When a man like Joe Phenix controls the machine the eye of Justice never sleeps.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A NOVEL WOOING.

As Tadcaster explained, as they glided along, there was great probability that spies were stationed at every ferry-house and railway depôt so as to command all ways of quitting the city, but to close the whole water front was, of course, impossible, so Tadcaster had adopted the small boat dodge.

All went well on the passage down the bay except that just before they landed on the shore by the old house the boat was nearly run down by a little fishing-smack seaward bound, a Jersey clam-boat evidently; whose skipper and crew after disposing of their cargo had laid in by way of ballast a large quantity of New York rum, judging by the energetic way in which they mismanaged the sail and tiller.

After landing, Tadcaster conducted Van Tromp to the house, and when they were fairly inside said:

"I suppose I had better prepare the girl, for as yet she is in ignorance as to whom she is indebted for this little pleasantry."

Van Tromp assented, and Tadcaster descended into the cellar.

Unlocking the grated door he entered the cell and stood in the presence of the prisoner, who sat by the little table gloomily surveying the miserable candle which had been furnished her and which illy illuminated the room.

The girl was not surprised at Tadcaster's appearance, for she had gradually come to the conclusion that it was more than probable he had something to do with the matter, as she had provoked his enmity by saving the detective.

Briefly Tadcaster explained the situation. It was his hour of triumph, and it was not in his nature to refrain from exulting over his victory.

"I warned you not to try to cope with me," he said, in conclusion, "but you, with the arrogance of your sex, thought your wits more than a match for mine, though mine have been sharpened by a constant struggle with the world ever since early boyhood. You entered into the fight, and what is the result? In self-defense I have been obliged to forget the relationship which exists between us and treat you as I would treat my worst enemy. But it is not my fault; you ignored the family tie when you attempted to interfere with my plans. At first I was amazed, and unable to understand why you interfered in the matter at all, but, since our last conversation, I have been thinking over the matter and now I guess that I know the truth of it. You are in love with Rutger Van Tromp, and you doubtless hope that, if you are lucky enough to give him a fortune, in gratitude he will marry you."

A look of contempt swept rapidly over the girl's face.

"Oh, yes, of course you never thought of such a thing!" he exclaimed, sarcastically. "Well, I object to the match, and as our father is gone of course I am your natural protector. Besides, the game is in my hands now. You were fool enough the other day to let me know your game, and so I set a trap to catch your trump card and I succeeded. I sent a dispatch across the water to old Esther signing your name to it in regard to the message confided to her by our father, Ishmael, and the old woman replied without suspecting that it was a trick. The missing will was concealed in the little iron-box safe, and that article is now in my possession."

"But you have not got the key!"

"Very true, and by that incautious observation I guess that you have, eh?" and Tadcaster laughed at his own shrewdness. "You must give it to me and so save me the trouble of breaking the safe open, and as in winning this game I have in a measure interfered with your

love affairs, I will make amends for depriving you of one lover by giving you another."

The girl looked at him with astonishment, at a loss to comprehend his meaning.

"As your brother, you know, it is my duty to look out for you," he continued. Then he went to the door and pushed it open. "You can come in."

Elbert Van Tromp advanced into the circle of light and a look of bitter anger swept over her face.

"And have you sold me to this man?" she exclaimed.

"Now, my dear Cynthia, that is not the way to put it!" he replied, in mock protest. "Mr. Van Tromp, allow me to introduce you to a lady with whom in early years you were pretty well acquainted. Bel Amcin is but her stage appellation, and the Arab girl—child of the desert business, is but one of those pleasant, attractive fictions common to the theatrical profession. This is my sister, Cynthia Tadcaster."

For the moment Van Tromp was amazed; now he understood how it was that the girl, when playing the rôle of the fortune-teller, possessed such an intimate knowledge of his affairs; the trick was plain enough to read.

"Quite a little family party, eh?" Tadcaster exclaimed; "now, Elbert, we only want your brother Rutger—the young gentleman who has been fortunate enough to chain the flighty fancy of this fair maiden and win her love—and my esteemed friend, Joseph Phenix, Esquire, late of the central office, whom we sadly miss."

Unconsciously the felon had used the words which the poet put into the mouth of Macbeth when at the feast he deplores the absence of the man whom he has caused to be waylaid and assassinated, and as the soldier-king is appalled by the appearance of the "blood-battered" Banquo, seated upon the stool reserved for royal use, so was the boasting felon's blood chilled within his veins when the voice of Phenix resounded through the apartment:

"Well, then, I am just in time!" the detective answered.

Despite his iron nerve a gasp of terrified surprise came from the lips of the outlaw when he turned and beheld Phenix standing in the doorway, a cocked revolver in his hand, and behind him Rutger Van Tromp and a couple of detective officers, also with leveled revolvers.

The game was up; Tadcaster was helpless, now, in the hands of his tireless enemy.

"You have played your cards very well; a most excellent game, I admit, and one that I have greatly admired, and if it hadn't been for the lucky chance that I had forethought enough to place a watch all along the waterside from Harlem Bridge to Spuyten Duyvel Creek—and it took a small army to do it—you most certainly would have beaten me, but as it is the game is mine, and I brought this gentleman along to witness the wind-up as I had an idea that he would be greatly interested in it."

"Oh, you devil!" cried Tadcaster; "it was you then on board of the sailing craft that nearly ran us down."

"You are quite correct; we were all there, but the running down business was the fault of the stupid fisherman; I told him to run close alongside of your boat so as to be sure that you were the party I wanted, for you had such a start of me that there wasn't any sure thing about overhauling you. But now I will trouble you to let me slip the bracelets on you."

A look of utter desperation came over Tadcaster's face, and for a moment he looked as if he was inclined to resist, although such an attempt would be mere madness.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "it is your game to-night," and he held out his wrists.

"Wait!" cried the girl, excitedly, a spot burning in her cheeks; "you gave me a promise, a life for a life!" and she addressed the detective.

Phenix shook his head.

"Better not claim it now—some other time," he said.

"No, now!"

"If he leaves this house, unless he goes as my prisoner, he will go to certain death," the detective warned.

"Oh, as to that I am willing to take my chances," Tadcaster cried, in eagerness, perfectly willing to accept a favor from the hands of the woman whom he had so greatly wronged.

"I demand the fulfillment of the promise!" the girl persisted.

It was on the detective's tongue to tell the girl of the death of the old man, killed by the abductor; that the Gipsies knew of the murder and blamed Tadcaster for it; and that even now some of them were near the house. Phenix had pressed all the Gipsies into service as spies, and it was one of the Romany band who had recognized Tadcaster at the Battery. But a sober second thought stayed his speech. Why should he interfere? If there was any justice for Captain Molly in this world surely he would receive it at the hands of his Gipsy kin; and so he yielded to the girl's request. There had not been, as yet, any charge made against the man; no one knew who he was, Phenix excepted, and so no fault could be found with him for allowing the prisoner to go free.

"Well, it is just as you say, miss; if you wish it so he is free to depart."

"Thank you, sir! I am really very much obliged, and if at any time I can return the favor you may command me," observed Tadcaster, with perfect coolness.

Phenix stepped aside from the doorway and escorted Tadcaster to the outside of the mansion.

"Look out for yourself," Phenix was prompted to say as he parted with the felon. "The Gipsies blame you for this business, and as you are one of them possibly you know what to expect."

Tadcaster merely nodded and walked away. He paid little heed to the warning, for he knew not that the old man had been slain by the abductor of the girl.

Elbert Van Tromp saw that he had been caught in a most unpleasant position, and when Phenix returned he dismissed the detectives, bidding them wait for him up-stairs so that there would not be any witnesses to the settlement which he intended to force Elbert Van Tromp to make. He was a little nettled at Van Tromp for aiding Tadcaster to elude him, and felt disposed to worry him if he could.

"Now, this is a nice little family party," observed Phenix, after the detectives had departed. "I have had the pleasure of meeting you twice before, Mr. Van Tromp—once when you fooled me about this precious rascal who has just departed, and before that when I visited you in the disguise of a Jew broker to get information about a missing will of your father."

"That will is now in this house in a small iron safe, and here is the key!" the girl exclaimed, producing it.

"Aha! that is good enough!" the detective cried. "The safe is right outside of the door, for I noticed it!"

Little time did it take now to produce the will.

"Well, what are you going to do about this?" Phenix asked, after the contents of the document had been made known. "You know that you are in a pretty bad box if we choose to put the screws on? Abduction, accompanied by murder, is a serious offense."

"Murder!" exclaimed Van Tromp, horrified at the intelligence.

"Yes; in abducting the girl the old man Lemuel was murdered. The affair has been hushed up, for the Gipsies are a strange lot, and they never trouble the law to revenge their wrongs. You have deprived this lady of her protector; now what are you going to do about it?"

"Anything you say."

"It will cost you fifty thousand dollars."

"Not a penny from that man!" cried the girl, indignantly, understanding what the detective meant.

"A hundred thousand then to charity," observed Phenix, firmly, "and you can make the disposition of the funds. All I stipulate is that that amount must be paid out of your own property."

Van Tromp made a grimace, but he was in the toils and could not resist.

"I give you my word, sir, that the money shall be paid, although it is a large sum when you consider how much this will takes away from me."

"Well, you have had your fun and now you must pay for it," Phenix answered, decidedly.

Van Tromp departed, feeling ten years older, and yet glad to get out of the terrible scrape so easily. Phenix accompanied him to the door; the detective fancied that the other two might have something important to say to each other.

And so they had, for Rutger had grown more and more to love the woman who had risked so much for him.

At first the maiden was coy, but what loving woman can resist when the man she truly loves pleads his suit? And so at last she agreed to be his bride.

The very next day Elbert Van Tromp made his word good, and the newspapers rung with praises of the generous New Yorker who had given a hundred thousand dollars to charity and yet concealed his name. The next steamer to Europe carried the schemer to a foreign land. He had left America never to return, he hoped, and thus it happened that charming Miss Gainsworth, hesitating between two suitors, missed both, and still muses in "maiden meditation, fancy free."

Three days after these events had occurred a large dry-goods box arrived at police headquarters directed to Joe Phenix. The detective opened it in presence of the chief. It contained the mortal remains of Captain Molly.

He had been killed by a knife-thrust through the heart. The knife was still in the body, and a slip of paper attached to it read:

"Justice has been done; a life for a life!"

Phenix realized that Romany men had executed Romany vengeance.

"I knew that he went to his death!" he murmured.

THE END.

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